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The Corsair Queen; or, The Gipsies of the Sea.

A ROMANCE OF STRANGE MYSTERY AND THRILLING ADVENTURE.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,

AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," "FREELANCE, THE BUCCANEER," "THE DARE DEVIL,"
"THE CRETAN ROVER," "THE PIRATE PRINCE," ETC., ETC.



THE CORSAIR QUEEN ON DECK.

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OR,
THE GIPSIES OF THE SEA.

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CHAPTER I.

THE THREAT.

"QUEENA, which shall it be, my love or my hatred?"

"A strange way indeed, Mr. Vance, to offer a lady your heart and hand!" and there was a sneer in the speaker's tone as she gazed upon the handsome man standing at her side in the moonlight.

"I have offered you my love scores of times, Queena Gray, and you have kept me hoping on and on that one day you would be my wife, and—"

"I never told you so, I never bade you hope, Vincent Vance."

"Not in words, true, but in looks and actions."

"You know that I have loved you since two years ago I met you, a school-girl at the convent in Paris where your father had left you, and for the past three months I have been your slave, following you from Germany to Italy, from Italy to Spain, and now I beg of you an answer to my entreaty to become my wife."

It was a beautiful woman he addressed, and yet in years she was but a child; but her form was perfection itself, and her face was so dark, her hair and eyes so black, she might have been taken for a daughter of Spain, in which land, with a party of friends, she was then whiling away a few weeks, preparatory to returning to her home in America.

An heiress, for the death of her father a little more than a year before had left her a grand old home in America, and an income to keep it up, she was sought for her money as well as for her beauty, though there were few men who did not bow down in adoration before her, when once they came under the fascination of her eyes and voice.

Her companion was a man of striking appearance, tall, courtly in manner, fashionably attired, and with a face strangely handsome, and yet with a look upon it of nobleness of character, that a close observer would see was a mask to hide an evil heart.

The two were on the piazza of a fashionable hotel in Madrid, and the moonlight streamed down upon them, and upon the flower-garden before them, and where were visible several couples promenading, while from within the saloon came the sound of music.

"You wish an answer to your offer of marriage you say?" and Queena Gray's voice seemed to have lost its softness and music.

"Yes, Queena, for you know how dearly I love you, and you have led me to hope you would one day be my bride," he said eagerly.

"You shall have your answer, Vincent Vance."

"I have led you on by coquetry to believe that I cared for you; but I have simply been serving a purpose in so doing, and that purpose is revenge."

"Revenge!"

"Yes, for I have not forgotten one who was my childhood friend, one whom I loved as an older sister, and who three years ago left the convent to return to America.

"You were on the vessel that carried her across the ocean, and she loved you, and you professed to love her."

"She trusted you and you led her on to her ruin, and, deserted by you, she one night took her own life."

"To whom do you refer?" he asked hoarsely.

"Hail! are your dead victims so numerous that you fail to recall poor Lou Wallace?" she asked almost savagely.

"Great God! Lou Wallace!" he gasped.

"Yes, my truest friend; her father and mine were shipping merchants together, and as her mother was French, she was sent to Paris to school, and there my father also sent me, for I could not be separated from her."

"We had built many a castle in the air for the future, Vincent Vance, and you destroyed them by your base treachery."

"I knew who you were, and what you had done, and I tried to win your love; oh! I have tried so hard to fascinate you, that I might make you suffer, if your stony heart is capable of suffering, and I am glad if I have made you feel."

"You ask me, sir, in your overbearing way; which shall it be, your love or your hatred, and my answer is your hatred ten thousand times before your love."

She rose to her feet and confronting him, he quailed before her fiery eyes.

For a moment he seemed to suffer all that

she could have wished: then he appeared as though about to throw himself at her feet in pleading, but checking such determination, while his face grew livid, he hissed forth:

"So be it, Queena Gray: you scorn my love and court my hatred: you shall have it, I swear, in all its venom, and you shall rue to your death the words you have just uttered."

"Leave my presence, sir!" she haughtily commanded.

Silently he turned away, and she was alone. But, brave as was her heart, it turned cold when she remembered his threat, and recalled the evil glitter of his eyes, as treacherous, as merciless as a serpent's.

CHAPTER II.

THE HAUNTED RUIN.

A FEW leagues from Madrid, in old Spain, lies the village of San Pablo, which many years ago was the abode of the Spanish Dons and wealthy merchants, who had built up in the West Indies and South America their failing fortunes.

Now, San Pablo is a ruined village, its inhabitants not what they were in the long ago.

Then, grand old homes, the castles of the rich, were gradually falling to decay, deserted by their owners, who sought other lands in which to dwell.

And to one of those old homes, grand in its ruin, I would have the reader accompany me, several days after the scene related in the foregoing chapter between Vincent Vance and Queena Gray.

Once the home of a Spanish Don, who, with his family and servants had one night been murdered in their beds, not one living to tell who had done the deed, the castle had been shunned ever since, not even being claimed by its heir, and year by year time had left its impress upon its walls, until at last it became a ruin.

And grand in its decay it yet was, standing up in bold relief, as it stood on the crest of a hill, with thousands of acres of forests surrounding it, and far away the village of San Pablo, whose denizens gazed upon it in awe, and gave it a wide berth, for it was said, and believed to be haunted by the ghosts of the dead, so cruelly murdered there years before.

As though not dreading the rumor of the forests being haunted with spooks, and the ruin by ghosts, a horseman was riding slowly in that direction, toward sunset the third day after the scene on the piazza of the hotel in Madrid.

He was well mounted, rode with the ease of a perfect horsemen, and passing through San Pablo had asked the way to the Haunted Ruin.

With awe at his temerity the one he addressed had pointed to the gray pile of stone in the distance, and answered:

"There it lies, and yonder road will lead you there, senor: but you will find it overgrown, for none but Gipsies dare visit that old ruin, or seek shelter in that gloomy forest."

He tossed the man a piece of silver and rode on at a rapid pace, turning into the forest where a weed-overgrown pathway led toward the castle.

A ride of half a league, and through the dark forest ahead gleamed a camp-fire, that seemed to add more gloom to the scene, rather than cheerfulness.

And then another, and another camp-fire came in view, until before the horseman was a Gipsy encampment.

Of men, women and children there were over two hundred, and the eyes of all were turned upon him with surprise, for seldom intruded any one into their lonely retreat.

The women were busy preparing their evening meal, for the shadows of the forest made it almost night there, though the sun was yet some distance above the western horizon.

The men lay idly about upon the grass, and the children, who had been playing until the horseman came in view, crept nearer their parents, as though dreading him.

"I would see your chief," he said to a dark-faced, evil-eyed man who stood in his path, as though to prevent him from riding into the limits of the encampment.

"Our king, you mean, senor."

"Well, king, if so you will; is he here?" asked the horseman impatiently.

"Yes, senor."

"Tell him I would see him."

"I will find out if the king will see you, senor," and the Gipsy turned away and approaching a larger tent than any of the others disappeared within.

Presently the man returned, and said: "Dismount, senor, for the king will see you."

"Why will he not come here?" asked the horseman, seemingly not liking to dismount and face the battery of eyes turned upon him from every part of the camp.

"You seek the king, senor, not the Gipsy King you," was the calm reply.

"Very well, I will accompany you," and throwing his rein over the branch of a tree, the horseman dismounted and followed the Gipsy, who ushered him into the large tent.

Before him, seated upon a large chest, covered with the skin of a wild beast, the horseman held a man of striking presence, and with that in his face and manner that commanded respect.

He was dressed in a fanciful garb, half cavalier, half Gipsy, and wore a soft sombrero, worked with gold threads, while in a belt about his waist was a long, slender-bladed dagger, the hilt of which sparkled with diamonds.

His face was as dark as an Indian's, his eyes deep-set, piercing and restless, and every feature indicative of resolution, intellect and courage.

Superbly formed, and with his dark, fascinating face, he looked every inch the Gipsy King he was.

At the entrance of his visitor he inclined his head slightly, and motioned for him to be seated upon a rustic chair, while he said in a deep voice:

"You would see me, senor?"

"Yes, if you are the Gipsy Chief."

"I am Chandos, the Gipsy King, senor."

"Well, you are the one I seek," said the horseman with some eagerness of tone.

"Your business, senor?"

"I wish work done."

"Red work, senor?" was the calm question.

"Yes, for it amounts to that."

"Spaniards are not wont to seek others to drive a knife in a foe's back, senor, as they generally like to feel the blade cutting its way to the heart," was the quiet response.

"I am no assassin, Gipsy," was the fierce retort.

"You are worse: you are a coward."

The man sprung to his feet, and his hand was thrust into his bosom, as though to draw a weapon; but one look into the calm face of the man who had insulted him, and he changed his mind, and said:

"I came not here, chief, to be insulted by you."

"You came to hire me to do a red deed, and I say you are a coward not to do it yourself."

"Why stain my hands with blood that my gold will buy another to shed?" was the reckless reply.

"You forget that the stain also reddens the conscience, senor."

"I forget nothing. There is one I seek revenge upon, and I will pay you for the work."

"Who is it, Senor Spaniard, you would have die?" was the cool question.

"I am no Spaniard, chief."

"Ah! your Spanish is pure," and the Gipsy King arched his eyebrows in surprise.

"I am an American, and—"

The speaker hesitated, seemingly sorry that he had confessed as much, and the Gipsy King said:

"Indeed! I have never visited your land, Senor Americano, never been across the boundless waters that lay between; but I have wanted much to go there, and will, one of these days, I have no doubt. But I forget—who is the gentleman you wish removed from your path?"

"It is not a man, chief."

"Ah! a woman, then there is indeed danger to you," and there was a sneer in the Gipsy's tone, which the other could not fail to notice, for he said quickly:

"It is not one I fear, but one I now hate as dearly as I have loved, and whom I have sworn no other man shall possess."

"You still love her then, instead of hate; but you wish her to die?"

"I do."

"How?"

"It matters not so that she dies."

"And you are willing to pay?"

"Your price," was the fierce response.

"Where is she?"

"In Madrid."

"Where?"

"At the Plaza tavern."

"A Spanish senorita?"

"No."

"An American senorita?"

"Yes."

"Her name?"

"The Senorita Queena Gray."

The Gipsy King took an ivory tablet and wrote down the name.

"Now, senor, my price is one hundred onzas."

"A large sum."

"It is a woman you wish to die," was the laconic reply.

"What matters it to you?"

"Nothing; that is my price."

"I will pay it."

"Then she will be dead the day after tomorrow morning."

"No, for she will visit this place on the third day from this, as a party of Americans, her friends, have heard of your encampment near the old ruin on the hill yonder, and come to visit it and your people."

"Then she shall never return."

"That would be the better way; get her apart in some way from her friends, and hurl her from the towers, or the cliff."

"I pledge you she shall die."

"The man who does the deed must not look her in the face."

"Why, senor?" and the Gipsy King again arched his brows in surprise.

"She is strangely beautiful."

"Senor, gold will buy the heathen to strike down his idol, the Christain to turn against his God, the Gipsy to strike at the heart of the beautiful babe; so say not that beauty of face can turn him from his purpose."

"It is well. Here is your gold, and the morning of the fourth day from this I will come to see if you have kept your pledge."

"Chandos, the Gipsy King, never shrinks from a pledge given, Senor Americano," was the response, and five minutes after his visitor was riding rapidly away from the Gipsy encampment, his dark face gleaming with malicious triumph.

CHAPTER III.

THE QUEEN OF DESTINY.

A GAY cavalcade of ladies and gentlemen dashed rapidly through the gloomy forest surrounding the Haunted Ruin the third day after the meeting of the American and the Gipsy King, and drew their horses down to a walk upon coming in view of the picturesque encampment at the base of the hill.

A few pieces of silver found ready holders for their steeds, and, dismounting, they ascended the steep hill and stood at the crumbling portal of the ruin.

There, involuntarily they paused, for a chill of dread seemed to fall upon all, and they turned their gaze upon the landscape spread out before their vision—the Gipsy camp, the village of San Pablo, and hill and valley beyond.

Wrapped in silent admiration, for a moment they failed to observe that a form suddenly appeared in the arched entrance to the castle's court, until, turning, the gaze of Queena Gray fell full upon him, and the eyes of the two met.

Impersonally beautiful looked the American maiden in her dark riding-habit and drooping plume, for her face was flushed with the rapid gallop, and her glorious eyes sparkled with delight and enthusiasm.

And the one she gazed upon was Chandos, the Gipsy King, standing in manly dignity before her, as though to bar her entrance to the ruin.

Compelled to admit to herself that her admiring gaze, as well as his own, was becoming a stare, Queena Gray flushed crimson, and said, with courtesy:

"Pardon, senor, but do we intrude upon your domain?"

Her remark drew the attention of all, who, turning, beheld the Gipsy King barring their progress to the ruin, and heard his reply in his low, musical tones:

"No, lady; this is the home of the spirits of the dead, not of flesh and blood; I hold no claim here."

"You are a Gipsy," answered the maiden, as though thinking aloud.

"I am Chandos, the Gipsy King, lady," was the reply, in a tone that was haughty and cold.

"Perhaps, then, some of your people can guide us in our exploration of this old ruin?" continued Queena, taking the initiative, as she had begun the conversation.

"It is a place haunted by bitter memories, the home of bats and owls by day, the abiding place of departed spirits by night. Why disturb its sanctity, lady, with the impious tread of curiosity?"

The Gipsy King spoke in a deep, impressive tone, and others of the party seemed to shrink from the invasion of the ruin; but Queena Gray was no coward, and answered:

"As the dead were naught to you, and you hold no claim upon these crumbling stones, I care not, for one, to follow your advice, so kindly let us pass, Sir King of the Gipsies."

The face of the man flushed, yet whether with anger or not none could tell; but he responded in the same musical tone:

"Senorita Americano, let me urge you not to cross this dread portal."

"Ha! you know me?" cried the maiden in surprise, and with a start.

"As the daughter of a far-away land beyond the sea," was the calm response, and it was evident that his words astonished the half-score of ladies and gentlemen present.

"I have heard that your race were gifted with the power to read fortunes by signs and stars; can you tell me my name, Sir King?" asked the fearless girl.

Instantly came the reply:

"The Senorita Queena Gray."

All started, for they believed that they stood in the presence of one whose power to read their destiny they dared not doubt, and several seemed anxious to retrace their steps; but the American maiden was not of a timid nature, and persisted with the question:

"So far you have proven your race are not belied; will you tell my fortune, Sir King?"

"Lady, I read not destiny, but there is one here who will place thy future before you as an open book; shall I summon our Queen of Destiny?"

A slight shudder ran through the maiden's frame, and some of the color faded from her face; but she answered firmly:

"Yes, I will hear what I have to face in life, be it good or evil."

A number of voices cried out against this, but seeing that the maiden was determined, the Gipsy King raised to his lips a small silver bugle, and wound a few notes upon it, which were thrown back from the walls of the ruin with many an echo.

Then, in perfect silence, all awaited, and soon, out of the ruined tower across the court, came a human form; a form bent with age, seemingly, and with long white hair falling like a vail around her, and in strange contrast to her scarlet dress.

She leaned on a staff and seemed to have numbered three score years and ten, for her wrinkled face was like parchment, her hands trembled, and only her black, piercing eyes, showed that the lamp of life yet burned brightly.

"Nana, this lady would have you read her destiny; can you do so?" asked the Gipsy King, as the old woman halted near.

"Can the sun not give light, though clouds obscure its rays?

"Can the soul not rise, though the body be dead?" answered the woman in a tone that was rich and full, in spite of her age.

"Then, good Queen of Destiny, read in the stars my destiny, and accept this as a souvenir from over the sea," and Queena Gray slipped into the withered hand an American gold-piece.

The woman returned no thanks, but raised her glittering eyes to the maiden's, and said, as though speaking unconsciously:

"Why unfold to a young life the shadows that darken the pathway from the cradle to the grave?

"Why turn the eyes of hope upon the tomb of despair?

"Why—"

"Come, Miss Gray, let us not tarry here to have this woman's croaking destroy our day of pleasure," and a young naval officer, who formed one of the party, stepped forward as though to draw the maiden away.

But she was firm in her resolve, and said simply:

"Go on, my good woman; you can tell me of no danger or sorrow, that I will not meet with a brave heart."

Her words caused the Gipsy King to glance quickly upon her, and she caught his eye, yet could not read the look she saw on his dark, stern face.

"Lady," began the Queen of Destiny, "if you will have the curtain drawn back from before thy future, behold!"

She wheeled quickly, stretched forth her hand, and as though pointing to an imaginary scroll unfolded against the gray wall, said in ringing tones:

"Beautiful as thou art, possessing riches as thou dost, neither will save thee from the sorrows, the misery, the despair thy destiny bids thee follow."

"Deadly dangers shalt thou know, heartburnings shalt thou feel, lonely hours of bitter anguish shalt thou pass, and from this hour but one joy will come into thy heart, and that joy shall be revenge for a wrong done thee."

"Lady, I have spoken."

She turned away and retreated into the ruin, and in almost horror all stood gazing upon Queena Gray, who, pallid as a corpse, stood with her hands covering her face, as though to shut out some awful vision that was summoned up before her by the words of the Queen of Destiny.

With an effort she at last shook off the spell, and glanced quickly toward where had stood the Gipsy King.

But he had gone, having silently glided away, none knew whither.

"Come, let us go from this awful place," she said in a hoarse whisper, and gladly all acquiesced, and mounting their horses they sped back toward Madrid, a shadow upon them the sunlight would not dispel, and a clutch, like the icy hand of death, upon the heart of Queena Gray.

CHAPTER IV.

A NOCTURNAL VISITOR.

IMPRESSIONED by what the Queen of Destiny had told her in the old ruin, and strangely fascinated by her remembrance of the dark face of the Gipsy King, Queena Gray was restless and ill at ease, after returning to the hotel.

Her brave nature had cast off the gloom coming upon her until night-fall; but with the shadows of night came the words of the Gipsy woman, and it haunted her with phantoms she could not cast off.

Unmindful of the gay crowd in the salons and garden, she went to her room and sat down in the moonlight, with a real heart-ache.

And as she sat there into her mind came Vincent Vance whom she had punished and then discarded.

Why she thought of him then she knew not, for he had left Madrid, all said, the day following her refusal of him, and she had not seen him since, and dismissed him from her mind.

Gradually the merry voices in the garden ceased, the hum of music in the salon died

away, and alone she sat in her room, the moonlight streaming in upon her.

She knew that it was past midnight, and yet she dared not go to bed for fear that her painful thoughts would cause dreams far more distressing.

Suddenly she started, for a form appeared upon the balcony before her.

She would have cried out, for she saw that it was a man's form, yet she had not the power.

He had gained the balcony by the lattice-work that extended from it to the ground, and the distance was very slight, yet she had dreaded no intrusion, as the garden was surrounded by a wall, and the gates kept locked at night.

One glance had shown her who the bold intruder was.

It was Chandos, the King of the Gipsies.

What could he want there?

Had he come to see her, or to pilfer, perhaps to kill?

Such were the questions that floated through her mind, and yet she could not move or cry out.

With a slight start, he recognized her.

His manner showed that he had evidently not expected to find her up.

"Pardon, senorita, my intrusion unasked," he said, politely.

"Why have you come here?" she asked, in a whisper, the words coming to her with an effort.

"To seek you, lady."

"And why?"

"Have the words of the Queen of Destiny driven sleep from your eyes?" he asked.

She hoped he had come to bid her have no fear, as they were untrue, and said, eagerly:

"Yes, I cannot, dare not sleep."

"Ah, lady, you did wrong to wish to have your future spread like an open book before you.

"When we know what is to come to us, then we live in dread."

"Why have you come here?" she abruptly asked, and in a cold tone.

"To see you."

"To see me, and why?"

"Lady, I am Chandos, the Gipsy King, and my tribe are my fiercest slaves."

"So I can believe," she said, with a sneer, and she added:

"But I feel no interest in you, your tribe, or your fortunes."

"Yet it is different with me, lady."

"How mean you, Sir Gipsy?"

He was silent an instant, and then answered:

"Senorita, a strange fatality seems to have given you a Gipsy name."

"Queena?"

"Yes."

"It was given to me by an old nurse, and my mother, liking it, never changed it; but you must leave that balcony, and at once, senor."

Unheeding her, he asked:

"Do you know its meaning?"

"Yes, a queen."

"True, and you were justly named, for you are a queen among women, and should rule as you deserve."

"Senor, I will not listen to such language from your lips, and I bid you, nay, command you, to leave me, or I will call for aid," she said, haughtily.

"I mean you no harm, lady, and would save you from seeing a tragedy, which would follow your call for help, as Chandos, the Gipsy King, allows no man to insult him, or pollute him with his touch, and not erase the stain."

She quailed before his lofty manner and bold words: but only for an instant, and then she said:

"Will you obey?"

"No!"

"Then I shall have to witness a scene."

"Hold! hear me for one moment."

"Will you go then?"

"Yes."

"Then what have you to say?" and she felt that the man held over her a strange, magnetic power.

"I would say, lady, that I am king of a roving race of forest children, and my lineage I date far back; but in my tribe, though there are dark-eyed daughters, there is not one whom I would ask to become my bride."

"The law of our people commands that their king shall marry ere they reach the age of two-score years, and within one moon I will be that old."

He paused and looked the maiden straight in the face, and seemingly understanding his words, she neither spoke or moved, but sat in her chair, in which she had again sunk, apparently without one atom of power over herself.

"Lady, your name, in our tongue, means a queen, and now I, Chandos the Gipsy King, say to you that I love you and ask you to be my bride, the queen of my people."

She put up her hand as if to warn him off, and from her lips broke one word:

"Never."

"Think, lady."

"Never."

"You cannot love me?"

"I fear you, I believe I hate you."

"This is irrevocable, lady?"

"Yes," she articulated in almost a whisper. But he heard it, and the moonlight showed that his face grew dark, while he said:

"Remember, lady, our race are revengeful when our love is cast aside."

She made no reply, but her form sunk further back in the cushioned seat, her eyes closed, and in vain she tried to cry out, and stretched forth her hands appealingly.

But they fell into her lap and she was unconscious, with the Gipsy King standing like a statue before her, gazing silently down upon her beautiful face.

CHAPTER V.

VINCENT VANCE AVENGED.

TRUE to his appointment with the Gipsy King, the horseman, who had before visited the encampment near the ruin, again appeared upon the scene, and asked the man who opposed his passage to lead him to his chief.

"The king is expecting you, senor, and you will find him in yonder ruin," was the answer.

The horseman shuddered as he turned his eyes upon the dreaded pile of stone, and asked:

"What does he there?"

"Awaits you, senor."

"Well, I suppose then I must seek him, but I like not entering the old ruin," he muttered, and he urged his horse on up the hill.

Coming to an impassable barrier for a steed, he dismounted, sprung over the rocks, and wended his way to the gateway, where the reader will remember Queena Gray and her friends had been met by the Gipsy King.

Here he halted, for the shadows about the place, its intense gloom and silence, caused him to dread invading its recesses.

"Well, senor, what fear you?"

The man started, and beheld the Gipsy King standing only a few steps from him.

"I seek you, king, to learn if you kept your pledge."

"Your own eyes shall see, senor."

"What, have you not buried her?"

"No, Senor Vance—"

"Ha! you know me?" and the man turned pale.

"Oh yes, senor. No, I did not bury her, for I wished that you should see that the Gipsy King kept his word."

"But I care not to do so."

"You must, senor."

"Must?"

"Ay, must, senor; come!"

There was that in the commanding tone and manner Vincent Vance had not the power to resist, and he said:

"Well, I will see the body; where is it?"

"Here."

"In this old ruin?"

"What safer place, senor?"

"True. You kidnapped her most skillfully."

"Yes, senor."

"No one in Madrid suspects you?"

"I do not intend they shall, senor."

"The report is that she heard here her destiny from the lips of some old Gipsy witch, and it so impressed her that she took her own life."

"Yes?"

"And they are searching everywhere to find the body."

"It will be a useless task, senor."

"If some of your people do not betray you."

"My people are not treacherous as are your race, Senor Vance," was the stern response.

"Where did you find her, chief?"

"King, senor, I am the Gipsy King," proudly corrected the Gipsy.

"Well, king, then, if so you will; where found you her?"

"In her room at the hotel."

"You were bold."

"Bold men are the ones who win success, Senor Americano."

"Did she not cry out?"

"No, for I had with me a perfume that pervaded the room and unconsciously inhaling it, she soon swooned away."

"And she did not die then?"

"No; I bore her in my arms to my horse, and brought her here."

"And killed her here?"

"You shall see her, senor."

"Lead on, then, if I must, and let me leave this hated spot, for I take the next ship leaving for my native land."

"But you'll never forget this ruin, senor, if you grow gray with years," significantly said the Gipsy.

"How mean you, king?"

"You have a conscience, and for you to have taken the life of a woman so beautiful, her form will often haunt you."

"I did not kill her, Gipsy."

"No, not with your hand, for you were too cowardly to strike the death-blow; but your gold bought me to do so."

"Enough! you insult me, because you know you have the power."

"You should never place yourself in the power of any man, senor."

"Bah! you have just placed yourself in mine."

"How mean you, Senor Americano?"

"You have slain a woman for gold."

"Oh! you dare not tell, so I am not in your power; besides, did you do so, my people would be like bloodhounds on your track."

"In your power, you say I am? Why, senor, let me tell you that I would unfold the secrets of my life to you, and dare you to make them known."

"Listen, do you know that he who lived in this very castle fell by my hand?"

"He was my foe, and he stole from me my sister, and she became his wife."

"It was long years before we tracked him here; but at last I found them, and all died by my hand."

"Great God! that clears up the mystery of this haunted ruin."

"To you, yes, senor; but if it becomes known, even years hence, you will be the one to have told, and the Gipsy bloodhounds will be on your track, and you and yours can never escape them."

"Come!"

He seized the frightened man by the arm and led him into the inner chamber of the castle.

At length they came to a small, rock-bound room, in which shone a weird, greenish light, but coming from whence Vincent Vance could not discover, and before him, on the stone flooring, he beheld a form lying.

He shuddered as the Gipsy King pointed to the beautiful form and pallid face of the woman, and listened to the stern words:

"There, Senor Americano, lies your victim."

"Come, let me leave here," he whispered.

But unheeding, the Gipsy King continued:

"There, where you see that red stain on her white robe over the heart, my dagger found its way."

"Your dagger?" gasped the now conscience-stricken man.

"Yes, senor, we Gipsies love to kill with the dagger."

"Here, take her hand, her pretty little hand, and see how like marble it is," and the Gipsy King leant over and raised the beautiful hand and exquisitely rounded arm.

But Vincent Vance could stand no more, and cried earnestly, while the sweat stood in great, cold beads upon his brow:

"Come, for God's sake! or I shall go mad if I stay here."

"You are avenged then, senor?"

"Yes, oh yes!"

"And I have won my price?"

"Oh God, yes! Come, lead me from here, and hark ye, Gipsy King, Queena Gray is avenged too, for from this hour I am a haunted man."

The Gipsy King smiled strangely, and led the way out of the dismal ruin, and mounting his horse, Vincent Vance dashed away as though he expected the dead form to come in pursuit of him.

CHAPTER VI.

SACRIFICED FOR LOVE.

It was some days after the flight of Vincent Vance from the Haunted Ruin, that Chandos the King of the Gipsies, was pacing to and fro over the stones of the court.

He was dressed with more than usual care, his long mustache was curled up at the ends, and his appearance was almost dandified; in fact would have been but for the calm dignity of his manner, and stern, resolute look.

As he paced to and fro his brow was clouded, his handsome lips stern set, and his eyes were ever and anon glancing through the pathway that led out of the forest.

Presently his quick ear caught a distant sound that brought him to a halt, and gazing down the woodland path he beheld a horseman approaching at a rapid gallop.

"Elic comes: now I will soon know," he muttered.

Leaving his steed, which seemed to have been hard ridden, at the base of the hill, the rider came on up toward the ruin, and soon stood before the Gipsy King.

A Gipsy himself, and with an exceedingly dark, cunning face, he approached and saluted his ruler, by placing both palms to his forehead.

"Well?"

It was uttered almost impatiently by the king, and the dark eyes were fixed full upon the man.

"He has gone, King Chandos."

"You saw him depart?"

"I did."

"How went he?"

"On a packet-ship sailing for the other side of the sea."

"You are sure there was no mistake?"

"There was none. Ere he reached San Pablo I saw him draw rein for awhile."

"Then he rode slowly on, and keeping my eye on him, I followed him to Madrid, but he had disguised himself—"

"Ha?"

"It is true, Senor King; he threw around him when he halted a Spanish cloak and hid his face beneath a Turk's beard and his head under the sombrero of a cavalier, hiding beneath his coat the hat he wore when he was here."

"He was cautious; and you saw the vessel set sail?"

"Yes, king, I saw the vessel leave the port, and then I returned to tell you, as you ordered."

"Very well, Elic, you have done well."

Without another word the Gipsy King turned away and entered a crumbling corridor of the ruin.

Traversing this with a rapid step that showed his familiarity with it, he soon came to a chamber that was in the base of the tower.

The stone steps had weeds growing in the crevices between, the wind whistled mournfully through the arched windows, and upon all was a look of desolation and decay.

But unheeding these signs of gloom, a young girl stood at an arched window, gazing out upon the forest and the landscape beyond.

At the sound of the king's step she turned quickly, and her face flushed with joy, while her eyes brightened with delight.

"Nunah, you are here, I see," and the king gazed upon the darkly bronzed face of the young girl, for she was scarcely more than sixteen, with a look she could not read.

Her form was slight, yet elegant and graceful, her hands and feet were small, and her attire such as is worn by Persian maidens, while a silk turban half hid the coils of black hair that encircled her head like a crown.

Her neck, arms, ears and fingers glittered with precious stones, which, however, the luster of her glorious eyes rivaled.

Full, red and passionate were her lips, and between them, as white as pearls, were her even teeth visible, adding a greater charm to the smile with which she greeted the Gipsy King.

"Yes, Chandos, I am here at your request; nay, your order, for it is for you to order and Nunah to obey," she said, in a rich, full voice.

"I fear, Nunah, what I have to say will bring a cloud to your brow, and wash away that smile with tears," he said, calmly, unheeding or unseeing the tiny brown hand she had stretched forth toward him.

"Has aught happened to worry the king of our tribe, that his subject Nunah must cloud her brow with sorrow for him?" she asked in a low, tender tone.

"Nunah, you know the laws of our people as I do myself."

"Yes."

"And obey them?"

"In all things."

"Bring it pain or sorrow to obey?"

"Yes, king, bring it pain or sorrow I obey the laws of our people."

"Bring it worse, Nunah?"

"I do not understand," she faltered, and the rosy hue went out of her face.

"Bring it worse than pain and sorrow?"

"What worse can it bring, Chandos?"

"Death!"

She started, and her lip quivered, but she answered firmly:

"I am a true Gipsy, King Chandos."

"I believe you: but I will not ask the sacrifice of you, but make it myself."

She seemed now thoroughly alarmed, and gazed into his face with a look that tried hard to read his full meaning.

But not an emotion did it betray, and with a sigh she said:

"King Chandos, no true Gipsy will allow you to make a sacrifice which he or she can take upon him or herself."

"What if the sacrifice be death?"

"So be it, if it save you, king," was the proud reply.

A moment he was silent, and then he said:

"Nunah, our law tells us that where the king of the Gipsies loves, it is death for another male of the tribe to love, and if he so dares, if the secret be known, with his own hand must he die."

"Yes, King Chandos," and the maiden trembled.

"Our law also tells us that if the king loves a maiden of his tribe, offers his love, and she loving him in return, they not being bound by the Gips

"By death?" she cried wildly.

"Yes."

"You mean that you will die?"

"The king must not break the law of his people."

"Nor shall he die."

"The law though, Nunah?"

"Yes, but there can be a sacrifice, King of the Gipsies," she said proudly.

"A woman sacrifice herself to save me?" he said almost scornfully.

"Yes, you shall live, King Chandos, and I will die."

"I have loved you as Christians love their God, and I will die in your stead."

"Noble Nunah."

"Give me the poison, for the knife is forbidden to pierce the heart of the maiden that was to have been the bride of a king," she said mournfully.

"Nunah, you stand upon the threshold of womanhood, and I am no longer young, so—"

"Silence! King Chandos, my sacrifice is one of love."

"The poison, I say, and then let me go among my kindred and die with their eyes upon me."

"Give it me, I command you, even though you be Chandos the Gipsy King."

Her manner was imperious now and it but heightened her great beauty; but his eyes did not soften, no muscle of his iron face quivered with pity, as he drew from his bosom a small silver flagon and handed it to her.

Eagerly she grasped it from his hand and placed to her lips the fatal draught, drinking deep of the flagon's contents.

"Now, King Chandos, Nunah, whom thou didst select for thy bride, has proven herself a true Gipsy, and she has taken with her own hand, the poison she knows is fatal; sacrificed herself for love, to save you to her people."

"Farewell!"

She turned suddenly and glided rapidly out of the tower-chamber, leaving him standing in grim silence.

He saw her, as he gazed from the arched window, gain the open space beneath the ruin, and totter into the encampment, leaning upon the arm of the old woman who had told Queen Gray's ill-omened destiny, and then he beheld the beautiful maiden sink down at the door of her tent.

Then up from the Gipsy camp went a wail of sorrow and Chandos, the Gipsy King, turned away from the window, his face still haunted with that grim, strange, unfathomable smile."

CHAPTER VII.

SACRIFICE FOR HATE.

FROM the base of the tower, where he had held his strange interview with Nunah, the beautiful Gipsy maiden, who had held hope of being the chosen bride of the leader of her tribe, and who had loved him with all the ardor of her passionate nature, Chandos wended his way along the dim corridors, as though thoroughly acquainted with the old ruin which others seemed most anxious to shun.

At length he came to a massive iron-bound door which had withstood the decaying touch of time well, and taking from his bosom a large key, he inserted it in the lock.

It turned with a creaking sound, the door swung open, and at the moment the Gipsy King staggered back, for in the dusky light a form was seen to spring upon him, and the rays of sunlight falling through a small window above his head, had flashed upon steel in the hand of his assailant.

The blow descended firmly and fairly for the heart of Chandos the Gipsy; but the blade was shivered against some object it could not penetrate, and the one who would have taken his life shrunk cowering back into a corner.

"Well, senorita, this is a new phase in your character, and you are as ready with a knife as though you had Gipsy blood in your veins," said the man, coolly, closing the iron-studded door behind him.

"I meant to kill you, that I might free myself from your power," said the low voice of a woman.

"True, but you never knew that I wear a shirt of steel net-work that turns aside just such well-meant blows as you gave, senorita; but may I ask how you got that knife, for the Gipsy that gave it to you will wish he or she had never been born."

"You need not fear treachery from any of your tribe, for they are too nearly allied to evil and yourself, to ever do a good action," she said haughtily.

"Then how came you with the knife?"

"I care not to tell."

"Mind you, if a score of heads fall, I will find out."

The woman saw that he was in earnest, and not wishing the innocent to suffer, answered:

"I found it in a niche in the wall."

"May I believe you?"

"There are others there; look for yourself."

He stepped to the place indicated, placed his hand upon the rocky shelf, and discovered several old weapons hidden there, and evidently placed there for some sinister motive, by hands long since crumbled to dust.

"Pardon my doubt, senorita; but I see you are to be dreaded, and therefore desire to come to terms with you."

"Between us there can be terms of but one kind," she said coldly.

"And name them, please?"

"What will you take to give me my freedom?"

"You are not for sale, senorita."

"What mean you, Sir Gipsy?" and the voice trembled, as coming out of the corner she suddenly faced him, revealing the countenance of Queen Gray.

"I mean, senorita, that you are to be the Gipsy Queen."

"Never!"

"You are too quick in your decisions, senorita."

"Never!"

"Let us talk together calmly, and see if we can not come to terms."

"No."

"I say yes; you are supposed in Madrid to have committed suicide in some mysterious way, your brain having been turned by the stories told you by the Queen of Destiny regarding your future."

"Bah! I am not so weak as that."

"It is also reported that you were utterly wretched from having driven away your lover."

"Who do you mean?" she asked quickly.

"The one whom rumor says you devotedly loved, and had discarded in pique, thinking he would return."

"I do not know to whom you refer."

"Doubtless, for your conquests are many; but I refer to the Senor Americano, Vincent Vance."

"I hate him."

"True, and you have cause; but report believes otherwise."

"Now, I can detain you here, while my tribe and myself fly to other lands, and if I release you, whatever you may say to the contrary, the world shall believe you to have been the bride of a Gipsy, if not worse."

"Villain!" she hissed.

"No, I wish to protect you, and therefore I beg you to become my wife."

"You insult me by the heinous proposal."

"No, for many, even the proud ladies of Spain, would fly from their homes to become the bride of Chandos the Gipsy King."

"They might, and I will not, for I am an American."

"A reason I love you more. I admire your people, and wish to visit your native land."

"I say never."

"Then, as you fully decide not to become, through loving me, my bride, let me give you another reason for so doing."

"There can be no other reason."

"Judging from what I know of your nature there can."

"Name it!"

"You are revengeful?"

"I admit it."

"Well, you owe your being here to one man whom the world admits to be honorable."

"Oh, curses upon that man!" she groaned.

"Yes, he deserves your curses and your hatred, for while you were unconscious with the drug I administered to you, I brought him to your side."

Queen Gray's eyes fairly blazed at this information, but her indignation kept her silent.

Then the Gipsy, with a slight smile, continued:

"Yes, I was determined that he should see the work which I told you he had hired me to perform, and I brought him here, having given you a narcotic in your food."

"Yes, I remember I became unconscious, and yet it seemed strangely like sleep, only there was one thing I could not account for."

"And that is, lady?"

"A red stain on my dress just over my heart; it was there when I returned to consciousness."

"I pricked my arm with my dagger-point and allowed the blood to stain your dress; there I told the Senor Vance, was where my cruel dagger was driven into your heart; and it unnerved him, and he fled from the spot, and has now gone back to America."

"How know you this?"

"One of my men saw him leave the port in the packet-ship, and he went in disguise, for it seems he gave out, the day that you sent him from you, that he was to sail in a vessel then leaving, yet remained to see that his revenge was consummated upon you."

"And he believed me dead?" she asked, in strangely calm tones.

"Yes, senorita, and said he was content."

"Oh! but he shall suffer for this."

There was a wicked glitter in her eyes, and her bosom heaved convulsively, and to add heat to the flame of revenge he saw burning within her, the Gipsy said:

"He said he would return to his native land and marry some rich heiress, now that you were dead."

"Ha! said he this?" she almost screamed.

"Did he mention her name?"

"I do not recall it, though I am satisfied that he spoke her name."

"Was it Violet Gray?"

"Ah! that was the name, for the flower, the violet, now recalls it to me," was the ready answer.

"Listen to me, Gipsy King: Violet Gray is my cousin, and she was my rival when we were mere children, and I never loved her; but I would spare her from that man."

"She will never be his bride unless she is rich, as he said he had run through with nearly all of the riches he had inherited."

"She is rich, or will be, if I die."

"Ah! she inherits your property at your death," smiled the Gipsy King.

"Yes, if I make no will."

"And you are dead."

"No, I am alive and will be revenged on that man."

"Oh, no, you are dead, for remember he saw you lying in this ruin dead, you know."

"But he will not dare tell of it."

"No, but it will soon be known in your land that you committed suicide, from disappointed love, or dread of what a Gipsy sorceress told you your future would be, and then your cousin will inherit your fortune, and the Senor Vance will make her his wife."

"You draw a fearful picture, Sir Gipsy, and one I would give my very life to thwart," she said, with almost fierceness.

"You can thwart it and live."

"Ha! how so?"

"Become my bride, the Queen of the Gipsies, lose your identity, and we will go to America, and you will then be there to gradually work out a fearful revenge upon the man you hate."

She started, her paleness increasing to pallor, her lips quivering, and her form trembling.

Silently he observed her, for he had nothing more to say.

"Suppose I refuse?" came in hoarse tones at last.

"But one of my tribe knows you are here, and that one is the Queen of Destiny; you can come to my tribe as one of the mountain Gipsies, for you look enough like our race to be one, and none will dispute my acts."

"If I refuse?" she repeated.

"Then I swear by the fearful oath of the Gipsies, that you shall die here in this ruin, and no one will ever know your fate."

She stepped directly in front of him, placed a hand upon either shoulder, and looked him in the face with a gaze that seemed to read his soul to its inmost depths.

Then she said in a low, but firm tone:

"Chandos, King of the Gipsies, I accept your terms."

"I become the queen of your tribe, and sacrifice myself for hate."

"Enough; within a few days I will take you to my camp, which I will pretend to leave tonight to go after you."

"I care not for the motive that prompts you to become my bride, so that you do so, for, Queena, I love you, and the soul of Chandos goes out with his love."

He drew her toward him, kissed her on her brow, she offering no resistance, yet shuddering slightly, as though a snake had touched her with his venomous mouth, and turning away he left her to her own bitter thoughts to nurse her aching heart alone.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HIDDEN GRAVE.

NIGHT fell upon the Gipsy encampment, and with its shadows a deeper gloom seemed to pervade the forest, rest upon the Haunted Ruin, and fall upon the faces of the roving people, as they moved slowly about.

The fires were not lighted, and only a couple of torches sent their red, flickering glare out into the darkness.

And between these two torches, which were about seven feet apart, lay a human form clad in pure white, and silent and motionless.

One look into the face and Nunah the Gipsy maiden was recognized.

Now her eyes no longer sparkled, her bosom no longer heaved; the lids hung over the orbs, and upon the heart the tiny hands were clasped, while about the lips was a pinched, severe look, as though she had died in pain.

Standing by each torch was a young girl, slowly dropping pine into the crate to keep it burning, and one by one came the Gipsies to gaze upon the maiden whom all had looked upon as their future queen; but who, not having been claimed by the king on their day of marriage, had been compelled by their cruel law, to die by her own hand.

Stern men with gray hair came one by one, and gazed down upon the dead with admiration, for had she not, in all her youth and beauty, proven herself a brave girl, and a true Gipsy to the forest born?

Old women came also to gaze upon that upturned face, and drop a prayer that the birds might ever sing above her grave and the wild flowers blossom there.

Young men, those who had loved her, and gladly would have had her love in return, drew

near, looked in silence, yet with deep anguish of heart, and fled away in the forest.

Then maidens, none of whom were her peer in beauty, and all of whom, though envying her the love of their king, had loved her, shed tears of compassion and glided on, to give way to little children to whom she had ever been most kind.

"But, schooled to command every emotion, and to outwardly conceal it, they gazed in silence and passed on."

And still the torches were fed by the two maidens clothed in white, and their light fell upon another form approaching.

It was the form of the white-haired Queen of Destiny.

Nay more, she was the grandmother of the maiden who lay at her feet.

Now her face was even more stern than usual, and silently she gazed down upon the form of her grandchild.

Presently, out of the royal tent came the tall form of Chandos the King, and he was prepared for a journey, for a man held his horse near.

"Gipsy King, pause here, before you go," cried the old woman.

Chandos turned, glanced at the woman and came toward her.

She uttered no word, but silently pointed with her wand to Nunah.

"Yes, she is a noble Gipsy," he said, his eyes resting upon the upturned face.

"She is the one you cast aside, King Chandos, and I, who read the stars of Heaven, the signs of earth, and the faces of men and women, tell you now, above her body, that you made a mistake."

"Woman, I, not you, rule this tribe," he said angrily.

"True, you have the right to pick where you will, and to slay this poor girl, for she died in your stead, king, but I, Nana, the Fate Queen, tell you that you have made a mistake."

"Then I shall be the sufferer, not you, Nana," he said recklessly and turned away.

"Hold! will you not see her placed in the earth?" she called out.

"No, for I have a long ride to the mountains," and he strode on, mounted his horse and rode away.

The old woman shook her head sadly, and then placed a small bugle to her lips and gave a loud call.

Instantly, out of the various tents came white forms and advanced toward the spot where Nunah lay between the torches.

They were young maidens of the tribe, and those who had never yet told their love to mortal man.

A score of them in number, they came forward, and stood with locked hands around the body.

Then six of them stepped forward, and while the others chanted a wild refrain, that sent its doleful echoes through the forest, they raised the form in their arms and then a sudden silence came upon all.

"Bear her away."

The command was in the voice of the Fate Queen, and she pointed with her wand to a spot beneath the shadows of the Haunted Ruin.

Again came the wild chant, as the Gipsy maidens moved away, walking slowly, and from every tent was heard the sound of sad music.

In front walked two young girls bearing the torches, then the six who carried poor Nunah, and next the other maidens, and from the lips of all broke the wild song to the spirit of the one they bore to the grave.

Standing like a statue, her outstretched hand still holding her wand, which pointed toward the burial place, Nana the Fate Queen, remained until the flickering torchlights were no longer visible.

Then, with the sound of the singing of the maidens in the distance, drowned by the doleful music in camp, she turned away and entered her own tent, of which none, not even Nunah, had ever been permitted to behold the interior, and which the tribe, from the king down, held as wholly sacred to her alone, as the Sorceress.

At length the music in the encampment was suddenly changed to a more joyous strain, and louder and louder grew the voices of the returning maidens, singing some merry Gipsy glee, and the old sorceress knew that her grandchild had been buried by those, whom the law of her people, alone allowed to perform the burial rites over a young girl whose heart was pure.

Even Chandos the king, had he remained, would not have been allowed to go to the grave, the locality of which could only be known to those who bore the body there, and who, by Gipsy law, dare not reveal it.

Out into the dense forest they had gone, and in some secluded spot already selected, they had buried Nunah, and then the earth had been smoothed over, the sod replaced, and the grave concealed from mortal eye, according to their law.

Back then, merrily singing, came the burial party, and then loud, clear, and thrilling rung out the music of the encampment.

But Nana, the Fate Queen, sat in solitude and

silence in her weird incantation tent, until the sounds died away, and darkness and stillness fell upon the scene.

Then she arose and glanced without the tent.

Not a form was visible, and no sound broke the silence, other than the hoot of night-birds in the Haunted Ruin.

A moment she gazed over the encampment, and feeling assured that it was lost in deep repose, she disappeared from sight.

But a minute after she reappeared and at her side was a huge dog, held by a stout chain.

Silently she led the way, the dog trotting quietly along, to the spot where the form of Nunah had lain, and then she drew a muzzle from the brute's nose and said simply in the Gipsy tongue:

"Take the scent, hound!"

It was a Spanish bloodhound, huge in size, and fierce in aspect, and he sniffed eagerly about the spot, uttering at last a low whine.

"Good! you have it, lie there!"

The dog laid quietly down, where Nunah had rested between the torches, and the sorceress returned to her tent.

Soon she came back, bearing in her arms a large bundle, and a wooden shovel.

Taking hold of the rope attached to the dog's neck, she said sharply:

"Lead!"

The hound at once set forth upon the trail, following it slowly, as the voice of the woman kept him back.

Along the path taken by the Gipsy maidens he went, following unfailingly the scent into the forest beyond the ruin.

At last he halted and uttered a low whine, and the Fate Queen said eagerly:

"Here is the grave!"

CHAPTER IX.

A MYSTERY.

"MOVE, hound! you have done your work, now let me do mine."

The sorceress, as she spoke, made the bloodhound move from the spot upon which he stood, and which was in the very center of the forest, surrounded by bushes of low growth.

Spreading upon the ground a large blanket, the Fate Queen, with a strength and quickness one would not expect from one of her age, took the shovel and began to remove the grassy sod that had been skillfully replaced upon the grave by the maidens, to hide it from the view of man.

One by one the sods were removed and carefully placed upon the blanket, and then the shovelfuls of earth were taken out, until it was evident that the body could not be far away.

Working more gently the woman kept on, never stopping to rest, and seemingly not tiring, until at last she felt that the end was reached.

Bending over she seized hold of the stout cloth, which enfolded the fair form, and drew it out of the grave; quickly unwrapping it from around the body, she walked off into the forest, brought back a large log, which one would believe was beyond her strength to carry, and around it placed the shroud.

Down into the grave she dropped the log in its white wrapping, and rapidly began to throw in the loose earth.

Packing it hard down with her feet, she soon had the grave filled, carefully replaced the sod, and not a single mark had she left to show that she had robbed the earth of a human body.

Then she turned to the prostrate form of the maiden and began to bathe her face with some liquid she took from a flask.

This she did for a long time, never tiring, until at last there was a shudder ran through the frame, and next a low sigh.

But the Fate Queen kept on with her work, until at last the eyes of the supposed dead maiden opened and looked her squarely in the face.

The moon had risen, and, though wan, it gave light enough to penetrate the dark recesses of the forest, and the maiden said simply, recognizing the form bending over her:

"Nana, my mother, is it you?"

"I am here, Nunah, to save you."

"Ah! I remember now; I have long been asleep."

"You have been like the dead, and right beneath the earth there you have rested for hours."

The maiden shuddered, and said, almost peevishly:

"Yes, you made me break the Gipsy law, and I live when I should be dead."

"No, Nunah, you obeyed the Gipsy law, for you took the poison; but I was determined that you should not be sacrificed even for Chandos, the king, and I gave you a powder to destroy the poison, or counteract its effects, and then told you my plan ere I again put you into a sleep like death."

"Ah! Nana mother, how can I believe what you told me of Chandos?" groaned the maiden.

"It is true; he has gone even now under a pretense of going to the mountains after a bride of another branch of our people, when he knows the woman he would marry is in yonder ruin, for I heard all that passed between them."

"And she loves him, and will—"

"She hates him, I told you; she marries him to be avenged upon one who sought her death."

"I tell you, girl, you must live, not die, and obey my commands in all things."

"In this bundle is clothing for you, and here are your jewels, which are worth a fortune if you need to turn them into gold, and I have here money for you."

"I will obey you, Nana mother, for even though you are the Fate Queen, I know your death would follow did our people know what you have this night done."

"Yes, and you would die, too, so obey me."

"Keep near us, and never lose sight of us, and never be seen by one of our tribe, for remember, you rest here," and she pointed to the spot from which she had taken the maiden.

"I will obey you in all things, Nana—mother."

"I feel that you will. Now here is your disguise, but you must make it a better one when you reach the city."

As she spoke she unrolled the bundle and drew from it a suit of clothes, such as were worn at the time by the young cavaliers in Spain.

This suit Nunah put on, and then, with a pair of shears, the Fate Queen quickly cut the long raven locks from her head, executing her work, by the light of the moon, with the skill of a hair-dresser.

"This liquid, Nunah, will dye your hair a golden hue, and yet wash readily off from the flesh, though the stain will remain for months on the hair: see?"

As she spoke she poured some of the liquid into her hand and rubbed it all over the short hair of the maiden, and the effect was startling, so thorough was the change.

"I am disguised now, Mother Nana, so that even the king would not know me," said the girl, with a sad smile.

"Better that he does not; now let me wash the stain from your flesh."

A wet cloth, which she had brought with her, soon accomplished this, and then Nunah stood up, so thoroughly disguised as a dark-eyed, blonde-haired youth of fifteen that the most observing eye never would have recalled, in looking at her, the Gipsy beauty of a few hours before.

"There lies your road, Nunah; here lies mine: farewell!"

The sorceress pointed further into the forest as she spoke, and slowly the disguised maiden turned away.

Watching her until she was out of sight, the Fate Queen then gathered up her bundles and blanket, and calling to her patient bloodhound, retraced her way to the encampment, and reached her tent unseen by any of the tribe.

CHAPTER X.

AN IRREVOCABLE BOND.

In her lonely prison chamber, for it was nothing more, sat Queena Gray, brooding in silence over her fate.

Twice daily had the Fate Queen come to her with food, and of the choicest kind that could be had in the Gipsy camp; but she had tasted of it sparingly, and seemed brooding so deeply over what was to be, that she cared little for comfort or edibles.

One evening, when the sun was casting long shadows across the valley, Nana, the Fate Queen, again appeared, and in her arms she bore several large bundles.

"These are to robe the chosen bride of the king for her marriage," she said.

Queena started, but made no reply, and the old woman unfolded the packages, and the maiden beheld a riding-dress of purple velvet, a Spanish vail of rare lace, and jewelry fit for a princess, with other things needed for a Gipsy's trousseau.

Silently she allowed herself to be robed in her handsome dress, and then stood in passive silence awaiting the coming of the man she had been forced to pledge herself to marry.

A noble-looking being he certainly was, one who, if not one of the roving race, would have been admired and respected among men and loved among women.

But Queena Gray had come to know him as he was, and that he ruled with a rod of iron his people, was merciless to man and woman, and that his life was stained with many a crime she believed.

At bay, and wholly at his mercy, she knew that she must become his Gipsy bride, or the bride of death, for she felt that he would take her life.

She did not care to die, for life held charms for her; but as his bride, as a Gipsy, it held but one passion for her, and that was revenge upon the man who had brought such misery upon her.

She was believed to be dead by her friends. She was to let them remain in that belief, and, lost to the world, to the past, she would live to make Vincent Vance suffer as she had.

At times she believed she hated Chandos the King of the Gipsies, and then she had to admit to a certain respect she felt for his wild nature, and that he certainly fascinated her.

Had his claws not been hidden by the velvety manner he held always toward her, she might

have rebelled: had, too, he been deformed in person, instead of the splendid being he was, courtly and grand, she might have preferred death to him.

But, as it was she accepted her fate, and waited in patience the coming of her master.

A quick step along the outer corridor, a knock, and Chandos the Gipsy King stood before her.

He too was clad in velvet, his tall form and dark, fascinating face, looking the king, and Queen Gray could not but have the thought flash through her mind:

"Were he what he is in appearance, and other than he is in race and character, I could love him, ay worship him; but as he is, as I know him, he is a savage, yet a magnificent devil."

"I have come for my fair bride, Queena, my Queen of the Gipsies," he said softly, speaking in French, in which language he had always addressed her.

"I am ready," was the calm reply.

"Then go, Nana the Fate Queen, call the tribe together, and let them know that you have just read by yonder stars, twinkling forth in the twilight, that Chandos their king has taken a bride from the mountains: that he has won a fair Gipsy maiden from another tribe of the Roving Race, and brings to his people as their queen, a bright particular gem to dazzle their eyes with her beauty.

"Go then, Fate Queen, and bid my children of the forest to await my coming."

The sorceress turned away and disappeared, and then, to Queena, striving oh so hard to be calm, the Gipsy King told that she must profess to be a daughter of the Franco Roving Race, and breathe no word of what and who she really was.

"It matters not to me who or what I am in the eyes of others, now that I am what I am in my own sight," she said contemptuously.

The Gipsy detected the scorn in her tone, and answered softly:

"All that man can be to you, I will be, Queena.

"Forget that a redder blood flows in my veins, than in yours, forget that I am what I am, and remember only that I love you."

His manner and words touched her, and she held forth her hand, which he grasped quickly and led her from her prison.

"From this moment you are free, Queena," he said softly.

She sighed and made reply:

"From this moment I go into bondage."

He remained silent, and led her on, taking a corridor that soon led them to the rear of the castle.

Here, in a small court, stood two horses, one his own, the other a magnificent animal he had bought for her, and which was richly caparisoned.

Raising her to the saddle he also mounted, and they rode through the open gate, and which the wind caused to swing to and fro with a doleful, creaking sound, and were soon traversing the ridge, upon the spur of which stood the Haunted Castle.

A long unused pathway led down the hillside to the forest below, and descending this they held on their course, the king leading, and passed through the forest toward the Gipsy encampment.

Presently the steed of the Gipsy King fell forward, and nearly unseated his rider; but both horse and rider soon recovered themselves.

Yet, little knew Chandos, the Gipsy King, that the animal he bestrode had sunk to his knees in the very grave dug for the form of Nunah, the maiden he had cast aside, and then believed dead.

And on they went, until soon they came in sight of the fires, blazing brightly, and heard the strains of music from the tribe, which was making merry over the tidings of the Fate Queen that their king had found a bride.

They had hoped for one of their own maidens to win his heart; but the stars had decreed otherwise, and they would be content, and right merrily they sung songs in honor of the choice of their chieftain.

Soon, out of the darkness into the light, rode two persons, and at once a wild shout of greeting went up, for all recognized Chandos their king.

And clustering around them, they led them to the Patriarch of the tribe, and kneeling before him, he performed the simple ceremony that united those of his race in marriage, and which all believed was the second service, as was the custom, as they deemed the bride had been first wedded to their king before she left her people.

"Come, Queena," and the Gipsy King led his bride, bewildered, frightened and with an aching heart to his tent, and ushered her into the spacious and comfortable abode, when a man, one of the tribe, stepped forward and said:

"There is a person awaits you within, King Chandos; he came with your ring, and I admitted him to your tent."

"You did right; now leave us," and as the Gipsy walked away to join the merry crowd around the camp-fires, the king turned to the

stranger, who had arisen at his entrance, and said politely in pure Spanish:

"Senor, I am glad you have come as you promised; we are ready."

Then turning to Queena, whose surprised look he saw, at beholding one present who was not of his tribe, but in the dress of a padre, he said, speaking in perfect English, to her surprise:

"Queena, fearing that you might have qualms against the marriage ceremony of our people, I had come here this gentleman, a priest, who will unite us by the ceremony of your church."

A flush passed over the face of the beautiful woman, and she took her place by his side, while in a low tone the priest read the service, and then left the encampment, escorted by the Gipsy King.

Sinking down upon her knees Queena buried her face in her hands and cried:

"Great God! that man will yet make me love him, devil though he be."

CHAPTER XI.

A SKELETON IN THE CLOSET.

THE second scene of my life-drama of the long ago, kind reader, lies not in the land of Spain, but shifts to America, where the curtain rises upon a plantation home in the Sunny South.

A grand old mansion fronts the blue waters of the Chesapeake, the velvety lawn, dotted with massive trees, running down to the sandy beach, upon which the waves of the bay break with a roar in mimicry of the ocean surf.

It is a large, roomy structure, comfortable in the extreme, and upon all sides there is a look that is indicative of the wealth and refinement of its occupants.

Back and to the left of the mansion half a mile distant, is a row of white cabins, the "quarters" of the slaves, whom we see toiling in a vast field of grain.

To the right of the residence are the out-buildings, with a stylish coach and team standing in front of the stable.

Within the mansion there is an air of luxury most inviting, and it would seem the very place for one, tired of the world's bustle, to while away the years in charming idleness and repose.

As the carriage rolls round to the door, a liveried negro coachman and footman on the box, a gentleman comes out of the spacious hallway and halts upon the wide veranda.

"I am ready, massa," said the coachman.

"Then drive quickly to the village, James, and get there in time for the arrival of the stage.

"If Mr. Rupert should not come, then return at once and I will drive to the city myself to see him."

"Yes, massa," and the stylish vehicle whirled away by the carriage drive leading up the bay, leaving the master gazing moodily after it.

He was a man of striking appearance, and dressed in a suit of white linen, and wearing a Panama hat: yet why describe him, for the reader has met him before, and in Spain, for it is none other than Vincent Vance, little changed in the six years that have passed since the night he fled from the Haunted Ruin near Pablo, believing that he left Queena Gray dead behind him.

At the present time however, he wore a haggard look upon his face, and he seemed ill at ease and restless, for he paced to and fro, now walking quickly, now slowly, and at times halting altogether, as though his body moved in unison with his thoughts.

Unmindful of the picturesque scene spread out before him, he never gazed upon the bay or landscape, or if doing so, seemed not to see it.

Thus nearly two hours passed away and then the rumble of wheels caused him to start.

Turning he saw the carriage returning at a rapid pace, and a moment after it drew up at the door, and an elderly gentleman sprung out.

"Judge Rupert I am charmed to see you, for I feared you had not received my letter," said Vincent Vance eagerly.

"Yes, Vance, I received the letter, and came at once, as your letter seemed urgent indeed; but how is your wife?"

"Well, I thank you, though absent across the bay just now," and Vincent Vance led his guest into the house.

A sumptuous supper was soon served, and lights having been placed in the library, thither the planter and the lawyer adjourned.

"Come, Vance, tell me what is the trouble?" said Judge Harvey Rupert, as he smoked a fragrant cigar.

"Oh I am in lots of trouble," said Vincent Vance impatiently.

"Why should you be? You are rich yourself, have married a rich wife, and have a fine little girl; what else do you want, man?"

"I'll tell you, I want money."

"Money! you want money?" asked the judge in surprise.

"Yes, for appearances are deceitful. I am not rich."

"I thought you were; but your wife is, certainly."

"She is thought to be."

"But she inherited a large fortune by the

death of her cousin, Queena Gray, who committed suicide, or was drowned in Spain some years ago."

"True, but it is badly mortgaged; but I might as well make a clean breast of it, Rupert, and tell you all."

"As I am to be your lawyer, so you hinted in your letter, I judge that would be the wisest plan."

"Well, you know I once loved Queena Gray, though my wife does not know that."

"She discarded me, however, shortly after she left a convent in Paris, where her old sea captain father sent her."

"Shortly after I left Spain she died, or killed herself, and though I had made up my mind never to marry, I changed it upon meeting Violet Gray—"

"Ah! her money and—"

"Yes, her money had something to do with it I admit, for she got the fortune that had been left Queena; but then she was a beautiful girl, and I loved her too."

"I had squandered all, or nearly so, that I had inherited, and as I had charge of my wife's estate, I kept my poverty hidden, and in the endeavor to win back what I had lost, have each year gotten more into the mire, until now this estate is mortgaged for two-thirds its value."

"Quit gambling, cease being extravagant, live with economy for a few years and this estate would pay off the mortgages," tersely said the lawyer.

"True; but there is trouble ahead, for a week ago I received this letter, which I will read aloud to you."

Taking from his pocket a letter, he read as follows:

"HAVANA, CUBA,
May 1st, 1812.

"VINCENT VANCE, Planter:

"Sir: Six years ago my sister, Queena Gray, died in Madrid, Spain, by her own hand it was said, and her fortune, inherited from our father, Captain Martin Gray, went to the next of kin, now Violet Gray Vance, your wife, no one believing that I was alive, as I was supposed to have been lost at sea when I was a boy of ten."

"But, though swept overboard by a wave, I was miraculously saved by striking against a piece of timber, which I clung to, and with the coming of dawn was discovered and picked up by a schooner."

"That schooner was a pirate craft, and because I would not join their crew, they held me a prisoner upon their island retreat in the Indies for all these long years."

"But at last I have escaped from them, and learning through a person I met in Havana, and who has furnished me with money, that you, and my cousin Violet Gray, are enjoying my fortune, and dwelling in my father's old home, now mine, I write you this letter to tell you to vacate in my favor."

"If you refuse, I will be in Baltimore within the month, and after giving proofs of my identity, will proceed to recover my inheritance by law."

"With respect,

HORACE GRAY."

"Well, that seems clear enough, Vance, and if he can prove his identity, you will have to give up," said the lawyer.

"Yes, and he can prove it," said the planter.

"You know this?"

"Yes, for I have seen him."

"Ah!"

"Yes, I came up from Norfolk a few days ago in the regular packet, and we ran down in the night a small shallop, and two of three men on board were drowned."

"The third was a youth, and the moment I saw him I knew, from his likeness to his sister, that it was Horace Gray who had written me the letter."

"I entered into conversation with him, and he told me he was a mere passenger on board, having joined the shallop at Norfolk, where he had landed from a vessel from Cuba."

"I asked him to go ashore with me, and we were put off at the dock below, and I brought him here."

"And he is here now?"

"Judge, I can trust you, I hope," said the planter in a low tone.

"There is no need of mincing matters between us, Vincent Vance; you have not forgotten, no more than I have, the night we killed and robbed—"

"Sh, for God's sake!"

"No, I will say it; the night we killed and robbed Planter Day of his twenty thousand dollars."

"We paid our gambling debts at college, Vincent, and I turned honest and studied law, and have done pretty well; as for you, I feel you have kept up your evil life, for you are now in trouble from mortgaging an estate you have no legal claim upon."

"Now, if you have money to pay me, I can keep a secret and be trusted; if not, I'll switch right over and aid this Horace Gray to get his fortune, and send you to jail for squandering it."

Vincent Vance turned deadly pale, and his hand holding his cigar trembled violently.

Impatiently he threw aside his unsmoked cigar, and said:

"Yes, I see I can trust you, if you are paid for it; well, I will pay you."

"What with?"

"Gold."

"You just said you had squandered your wife's fortune."

"True, it is heavily mortgaged, but I can work it off, as you say, in time."

"But that is not now."

"I know, but the boy's death would give me time."

"Ah!"

"Yes, if there was no claimant for the place could soon pay off the mortgages."

"That is true; but wherein do you wish my services?"

"To get rid of the boy."

"Ah! I see, I see," and the lawyer bent upon the planter a look of devilish cunning, as though he understood fully what was expected of him.

CHAPTER XII.

A RED COMPACT.

"You see what?" growled Vincent Vance, as soon as the lawyer ceased nodding his head in a knowing way.

"I see that you want the boy, the heir to this estate, out of the way."

"Why a blind man can see that; if he proves himself Horace Gray, out of this home I go with my wife and child."

"They to the poor-house and you to jail."

"Curse you! don't be so plain in your talk, Harvey Rupert."

"Don't like it, eh? Well, what's to be done?"

"Get rid of the boy."

"Certain."

"And at once."

"True."

"And forever."

"More wisdom."

"But how?"

"Have you formed no plan?"

"No."

"Don't lie to me, Vincent Vance."

"Well, suppose I say I have?"

"I know what it is."

"In God's name, how?"

"I read it in your face, and your words betrayed as much."

"Then tell me my plan."

"You wish the boy killed."

"Sh—!"

"Oh, nobody is listening; you wish him killed?"

"Yes."

"And you wish me to do the deed?"

"Or hire some one."

"Nonsense; you say that merely to pour oil on my feelings; but you know you desire me to do the work you dare not do."

"I thought you, being a lawyer in the city, could hire it done."

"Bah! why put yourself in the power of another by paying to have that done you can do yourself?"

"But I cannot do it."

"True, you have not the nerve to drive a knife into a man's heart, or touch a trigger and send a ball through a foe's brain; but report has said of you that you have caused many a poor girl to take her own life, and of the two kinds of scoundrels give me the murderer to the wronger of innocent, trusting women."

"You should have studied for the church, you preach so eloquently," sneered the planter.

"And you should have been in jail years ago for your crimes; but come, let us not quarrel, but talk business."

"That is what I desire."

"Well, where is the boy?"

"In this house."

"Ha!"

"I mean it; I let him in at night, took him to a wing which is never occupied, and which was used as a prison in the Revolution, my wife says she has heard her parents say, and there he is."

"No one knows he is there?"

"No."

"You are sure?"

"Yes."

"You brought him with you from the vessel?"

"Yes."

"Who knows that he landed with you?"

"No one; he followed me ashore, and I detained him until the vessel sailed."

"He knows who you are?"

"Oh, yes, for I told him, and more, he remembers his old home."

"I told him that we could settle our trouble peacefully, and asked him to come home and see my wife."

"She is away, and I led him, unseen by the servants, up-stairs, knocked him down and dragged him to the prison wing, when I put him in irons and left him there."

"Strange he does not call out."

"No one would hear him if he did with the walls around him."

"You have seen him since?"

"Yes, for I carry him his food."

"He will not compromise?"

"No, for I have threatened to have him arrested as a pirate."

"Well, he will have to die."

"Certainly."

"And you are afraid to kill him?"

"I want not my hands stained with blood."

"True, I had to give old Day the death-blow I remember, though you fingered the greater

part of the money; but the stain on your conscience does not show, and—"

"No more preaching, Rupert, but say if you will do the deed?"

"That depends."

"Upon what?"

"The price you will pay."

"Ah! well, I will give you one thousand a year for five years."

"This estate is worth, with its slaves, just twenty times that sum."

"What of that?"

"I must have one-tenth of its value."

"Mercenary wretch."

The lawyer smiled, but made no reply, and after awhile Vincent Vance said:

"Well, I will give you the sum, two thousand a year."

"What guarantee have I?"

"My word."

"No good."

"Curse it then, my note."

"Worthless."

"In Satan's name then, what do you want?"

"Security."

"I have none to give."

"What have you done with your wife's jewels?"

"Ha! I had forgotten them; but she will not give them up."

"Don't ask her."

"What do you mean?"

"Take them."

"I dare not."

"You are stupid; rob the house by night, or so have it thought, and get the jewels."

"By Heaven! I will."

"What are they worth?"

"About ten thousand all told."

"They are worth more, for I saw her wear at the ball in the city last winter, a necklace that was worth that."

"Well, I will give you the necklace as security."

"No, I must have her jewel case; the gems will all be kept safe for redemption when you have the money."

"Curse your grasping soul, why do you wish so much?"

"Curse your murderous heart, why do you want an innocent boy killed?"

It was a direct blow, and Vincent Vance winced and said:

"Well, I will do as you wish."

"Enough! where are the jewels?"

"In an iron chest in my wife's room."

"And the key?"

"I know one that will fit it, though she has the key: I will make her believe she left it unlocked inadvertently."

"Tell her what you please, but get the jewels."

"When you have killed—I mean when the boy is dead."

"Get the jewels, put them in your desk here and give me the key: then show me the youth, and I will do the work, and together, after midnight, we can carry the body to the shore, take a boat, and run out and drop it into the lake."

"A good idea; now I will get the jewels."

He arose and left the room nervously, was gone about ten minutes and then staggered into the library as white as a corpse, crying in hoarse tones:

"The jewels are gone! the chest has been robbed!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

"VINCENT VANCE, you lie!"

The words came from Judge Harvey Rupert, and springing to his feet he grasped the shoulder of the planter with a gripe of iron.

"No, Rupert, indeed I tell the truth: the chest was unlocked and the jewels gone," earnestly said Vincent Vance.

"You took them to keep from giving them to me."

"Why should I? The place is worth more to me than the jewels, and besides, I would far rather have them go as security, than have the exposure which you know would send me to prison."

"True, Vance, you have nothing to gain by it, but who could have taken them?" and the lawyer now felt convinced that the planter was at least innocent of taking the jewels.

"I cannot tell."

"The servants?" suggested the lawyer.

"Are old family slaves that could be trusted with anything."

"Then we must look elsewhere, but first let us see this claimant to the estate, and then we will decide what is best to be done, for I wish to help you out in this matter."

"For gold?"

"Oh yes; not from love of you I will swear."

"Is the house quiet?"

"I will dismiss the servants for the night, and then we will go to see Horace Gray."

He touched a bell and a gray-haired negro butler appeared.

"William, the judge and myself will sit up late to-night, so shut up the house and you can all retire."

"Yes, massa," and the butler departed, and in a quarter of an hour the mansion was as quiet as the grave. Having waited for some little time, the planter arose, took up the massive silver candlestick, and said simply:

"Come!"

Without a word the lawyer followed him out into the hall, up the broad stairs, along a narrow hallway to what appeared to be the end of the house, for a large mahogany closet stood there, filling up the space at the termination of the passage.

Taking a key from his pocket he unlocked the door of the wardrobe, which appeared to be a receptacle for clothes not worn in the warm weather.

These he pushed aside and touching a spring, the back of the closet swung open, revealing a narrow hall beyond.

Stepping through the wardrobe, the two men closed the doors after them, and were in the wing of the mansion known as "the prison."

It seemed the oldest part of the ancient mansion, the walls being three feet thick, and the windows that looked out on the front and rear were sealed up, air and light coming in from the roof.

There was a large room upon one side, and two smaller ones upon the other, and within one of the latter was a brick closet with an iron door, the latter being closed.

The whole wing was a dismal-looking place, and, whatever it had been built for, it certainly was forbidding enough, and suggested spooks and ghosts as nightly marauders through its dominions.

Another key he carried with him opened the iron door in this brick closet, and a space ten feet by four was revealed, with a row of iron chairs against the back wall, and chains attached, which showed plainly how it had been occupied in the olden time.

But it was unoccupied now, and white as a corpse Vincent Vance stood gazing at one of the vacant chairs.

"He has gone too," said the lawyer, in hoarse tones.

"Yes; but in God's name how?" gasped the planter.

"This may explain," and the judge picked up a piece of paper from one of the iron chairs.

It had writing upon it, and holding it to the candle, he read aloud:

"There is an old saying that you must 'fight the devil with fire,' Vincent Vance, and I intend to adopt that method with you."

"I suspected you of treachery when I came here, and determined to watch you; but you were quicker in your tactics than I suspected you would be, and by knocking me down, got me into this dismal prison."

"I remained here until I had thought over a plan of action, and then, being fully acquainted with a secret outlet of this pen, a circumstance that will prove to you that I am what I represent, having discovered the secret in boyhood, I slipped the irons readily off my small hands and feet, and now bid you farewell, with the promise that you will hear again from me."

HORACE GRAY."

In silence the two men stood regarding themselves for some minutes, and then the lawyer spoke:

"I wonder if he took the jewels?"

"Who else could have done so? If he knew there was a secret outlet from this wing, and which I confess was unknown to me, he must have known that there is a secret way of getting into the iron safe, which is fitted into the wall of a closet in my wife's room."

"Then he knew that secret too, and your prisoner and your jewels are gone."

"And I am ruined," groaned the planter.

The Corsair Queen.

"Bah! let it come out; if you are innocent all night; you are so often guilty, I believe it really frightens you to be innocent for once."

"Come, let us go down to the shore and meet my wife," and calling to the butler to have breakfast ready, and plates set for his wife and daughter, Vincent Vance led the way down the gravel walk leading to the inlet.

The schooner had in the mean time run into the bay, dropped anchor, and a boat touched the shore, pulled by a negro crew, just as the planter and lawyer got there.

"Out of it sprung, unaided, a tall, slender woman, with a beautiful face and well molded form; but an air that was imperial in its haughtiness.

She was attired with taste, her face was flushed with the excitement of the sail, and she greeted her husband with the air of one who felt that she was mistress if he was master.

To the judge she gave a kindly greeting, for Mrs. Violet Vance was a hero-worshiper, and Judge Harvey Rupert stood at the head of his profession, and was universally courted, for the world knew not of the heart beneath that intelligent, handsome face, and suave manner.

There also sprung out of the boat a perfect little fairy of five years, a child with the darkest blue eyes, fringed by the longest lashes, a rose-bud mouth, a velvet complexion, and long red-gold curls, that fell to her waist.

Her form was faultless, willowy, and her every movement was as graceful as a fawn's, and her voice, low and soft, was almost pathetic in its tone.

"Zitelle, my daughter, this is your papa's particular friend, Judge Rupert," said Mrs. Vance, and the little maiden greeted him sweetly, and with the air of a coquette so often seen in pretty children.

"Zitelle, what a strange name; where did you find it, Vance?" asked the judge, as they went toward the mansion, the negro crew following with the baggage.

"I'll tell you, judge; the night that Zitelle was born there was a terrific storm, and it swept the bay of many a proud vessel.

"In the morning I went down to the shore, and a tiny boat had been cast out upon the sands.

"It was apparently the gig of some vessel of war, and yet I have never been able to find out from whence it came; but, as it was thrown directly upon our shore, and was unharmed by the rough waves, I took its name, which was on each bow in gilt letters, for my baby-girl."

"And it was Zitelle?"

"Yes."

"It is an odd and pretty name, and I never heard it but once before."

"And where was that, judge?" asked Mrs. Vance."

"I visited a camp of Gipsies once, who were encamped on Long Island, and remember that the queen, a beautiful woman, called her little girl Zitelle."

At the name of Gipsy, Vincent Vance started and turned pale, but neither the judge nor his wife noticed it, and at that moment they arrived at the mansion and went to the breakfast-room, for the sail on the Chesapeake had given Mrs. Vance and Zitelle a good appetite.

After smoking their cigars on the veranda, when breakfast was over, the judge and Vincent Vance went into the library, for the former had hinted that he had a plot to submit that might work the planter out of his difficulties.

While the gentlemen adjourned to talk business Mrs. Vance went to her rooms, and each moment her husband grew more restless, anticipating the discovery of the theft of the jewels.

At last, as no cry of alarm came from her room, he said, excitedly:

"Judge, I must go and see, for she may have fainted upon discovering her loss."

"Nonsense! she may not find they are gone until the next ball is given, when she wishes to wear them."

"No, she will make the discovery when she takes off the gems she is wearing and puts them in the iron chest. I must really go and see."

The man was so nervous that the lawyer thought it best to have the matter over with, and Vincent Vance ascended the stairs and entered his wife's room.

To his horror he beheld her seated in front of the iron chest, which was open, and in her hands she held the case of missing jewels.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MYSTERIOUS PRESENT.

So struck dumb with amazement was Vincent Vance at the discovery he made, that for full a moment he stood gazing in silence at his wife, she being unconscious of his presence.

Then it flashed through his mind that she had taken the jewels over the bay with her, or hidden them in some other place, and he was about to retreat and tell the judge that they had been found, when his wife muttered:

"But how could he have gotten into the chest, for I alone keep the key?"

What did this mean?

She certainly knew that some one had been in the iron chest, and she referred to himself evidently.

Again he started to retreat, when once more her words caused him to hesitate:

"Then the rumors that he is embarrassed are not true, for he could not afford to give me such a present. I will go and thank him at once."

She half arose, when her husband stepped boldly into the room, for her words he must have explained, or he would go mad, he feared.

"Ah! Vin, it is you. I was just going to thank you for your beautiful present, though how you ever got into my iron chest, I cannot tell."

She went up to him, put her arms around his neck and kissed him.

"Why, what do you mean, Vio?" he asked in a constrained voice.

"Now do not plead ignorance, for fear I may scold you for going into the iron chest; but it is perfectly lovely, indeed it is, and I will give a ball especially to wear it."

"Violet, in the name of Heaven, what are you talking about?" gasped the bewildered man.

"Why, how well you act, Vincent; what am I talking about? why, the beautiful medallion with your miniature in it."

Vincent Vance could not have spoken if his life had depended on it, and thinking he stood confessed by silence, Mrs. Vance continued:

"I knew as soon as I opened the chest that some one had been there, for the pearl necklace was in the case where I always keep the diamonds, and things were generally changed; but I suppose you took a good look at the jewels; yet I don't wonder, as they are a goodly show; but, Vin, how in the name of wonder did you get into the chest?"

"How did I get into the chest?" he echoed.

"Yes, for I had the key."

"You had the key!"

"You know I always keep it in a pocket in my underskirt."

"True."

"Now, sir, how did you get the chest open?"

"You missed nothing?" he eagerly asked.

"On the contrary, I find the beautiful medallion."

"You did not close the spring when you left; it did not catch," he said with reviving courage, yet still mystified.

"How negligent of me; I never did such a careless thing before, and I will not be guilty of it again, for some one else than you may find it open."

"Yes, and rob you."

"I am not afraid of the servants, but then they shall not be tempted again."

"Now, sir, when did you have this miniature painted?"

She went to the chest, opened it and took out the medallion.

It was of massive gold, in the shape of a heart, with a likeness on one side, surrounded by a circle of opals, and upon the other was a dagger of precious stones, the hilt being of diamonds, the guard of pearls, and the blade of rubies.

The medallion was attached to a chain of solid gold, and the miniature was a likeness of Vincent Vance some half dozen years before.

He gazed upon it in almost horror, his wife thinking his look one of feigned surprise, and said:

"Speak out, Vin, when was this exquisite miniature painted?"

"Seven years ago, Violet, when I was in London," he gasped.

"Doubtless for some fair girl who discarded you; but I forgive you, Vin, as the medallion is for me; but it must have cost a very large sum."

"Yes, a large sum."

"And, Vin, I have heard it whispered of late that you were financially in trouble, yet I did not see how that could be."

"Of course not, Vio."

"I knew that you had a small income of your own, and the plantation has paid well, and there has been a large sum laid up each year, as you know."

"Yes, dear."

"Then how could these rumors get out?"

"Talk, all talk, Violet; you know what women are."

"Yes, being one myself; but these rumors, though told me over the bay by women, came from men; but I told them you could not touch the estate, or the bank account, so that it must be a mistake."

"All a mistake, Violet, I assure you."

"Oh, this beautiful present you have given me assures me of that, and it must have taken all of your income for years to buy it; so if you want a few thousands, Vin, I will sign the bank drafts for the amount."

"No, no, my dear, I do not need any money; I made a little speculation off of some property in Baltimore."

"I am glad you like the present; now I must return to the judge, for I have left him quite awhile," and the frightened man returned to the library to lay the mysterious affair before his associate in crime.

CHAPTER XVI.

A CONFESSION.

"RUPERT, what do you think?" and Vincent Vance took his stand opposite to the lawyer, looking him straight in the face.

"That depends wholly, Vance, upon what subject you desire me to think upon," was the cautious reply.

"I have just come from my wife's room."

"Is that any thing peculiar?" asked the lawyer.

"And the jewels are there."

"No!"

"I tell the truth."

"It is a blessing to know it."

"Which?"

"The truth."

"Yes, the jewels are all there," went on the planter unheeding the sarcasm of the lawyer.

"Well?"

"I saw them in her lap and it astonished me."

"She took them with her to make a splurge with, among the lesser lights of the other shore."

"No, she left them here."

"Where?"

"In the chest."

"In some secret drawer you knew nothing of."

"No, in the place where she always keeps them; but they had been moved, as she noticed."

"This is strange."

"I have something stranger to tell; there was another piece of jewelry with them."

"What was it?"

"A solid gold medallion with a miniature likeness in it."

"Of whom?"

"Myself, and taken some seven years ago when I was abroad."

"Whom did you give it to?"

"A lady I once loved and expected to marry."

"Who, may I ask?"

"Miss Queenie Gray, my wife's cousin."

"The suicide?"

"Yes."

"Then if you gave her the medallion, I suppose it was sent with her effects to your wife, her heiress?"

"No, it was then simply a miniature in a gold frame; now the likeness is in a medallion that is worth more than my wife's jewels."

"You astound me."

"It is true though."

"And it was in the jewel case?"

"Yes."

"And your wife knows nothing of it?"

"She suspects that I had it made and gave it to her, and accused me of opening the iron chest and placing it there, while she was absent, to surprise her upon her return."

"Strange indeed; but perhaps this youth, this Horace Gray took the jewels, knowing some way to open the chest, and then deciding to return them, put them back, in some way leaving the medallion which he had gotten from his sister."

"No, for they were not there when I retired last night; they were there this morning, and I know they could have only been returned while I slept."

"That might have been done."

"But how?"

"There may be corners and secret chambers in this old house you know not of."

Vincent Vance turned pale at the thought, and huskily whispered:

"And the youth, knowing them, may be now concealed in the house?"

"Yes."

"God forbid!"

"It looks so, for the jewels to be returned, and with them this trinket that he evidently in some way got from his sister in the past."

"That could not be, Rupert, for the boy was lost ten years ago, before I met his sister, and I tell you I only had that miniature painted in London seven years ago."

"More mystery then."

"And the medallion is a strange one."

"I am on a lee shore, for I cannot help you, Vance."

"And more, my wife hinted that gossips told her I was financially in trouble; but she laughed at the report, when she saw the piece of jewelry she supposes I gave her."

"I am bewildered, Vance."

"And I am more, for she offered to give me her name to drafts on the bank, where the estate money is deposited, and the crop sales, each year."

"That is generous, and it may tide you over for awhile, for she would sign for a few thousands at least."

"Tide the devil over! Rupert, there is no money in the bank."

"What?"

"Oh! I mean it, and I might as well make a clean breast of it, for you alone can aid me."

"Speak out, and when I am not acting in the dark I can perhaps see how to steer through these breakers, but I tell you frankly the tides I hold must be a golden one."

"It shall be if you can aid me."

"Well, what has become of the money that the bank held?"

"Gone."

"Where."

"I gambled it away."

"How did you get it?"

"Drew it."

"But how?"

"By drafts."

"Of course, but I thought that money could only be drawn by your wife's signature?"

"That is true."

"And she gave it to you?"

"Don't be stupid; no, she gave me nothing. I wrote it myself."

"Forged her name, eh?"

"Sh—!"

"Don't be silly; you are as frightened at writing another's name, as you are at seeing blood."

"Sh—!"

"Listen; if your wife knew this her pride would not let her make it known."

"Don't believe that; she has found out from some anonymous source, that I loved her cousin, and married her for her money."

"Which you did?"

"Which I did; I could not starve."

"True; well, she has changed her opinion of you?"

"Yes, and I think she does not love me; but this present of the medallion comes in well to soften her toward me."

"Strike her during this season of softness for a few thousand."

"Where would she get it?"

"True, I forgot that you had already struck the bank for all."

Just then a knock at the door caused the guilty planter to start, and in answer to his call to come in, his wife swept into the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

A LAWYER'S PLOT.

At the sight of his wife Vincent Vance seemed to lose the power of speech and motion, believing that all was lost, and known.

But her manner at once reassured him, as she advanced to the judge, saying pleasantly:

"Judge, pardon, please, my intrusion; but I was compelled to ask Vin to do a favor for me, and took advantage of it to show you the magnificent present I have received."

She handed the courtly lawyer the medallion and chain, and rising, he examined it with a minuteness and interest that could not but please the recipient of such a small treasure.

"It is grandly beautiful, madam, and most generous in your good husband," he answered, calmly, handing it back to her.

"It was indeed kind of him; now, Vin, I wish you to fill up a bank draft for me and I will sign it."

Vincent Vance started, and fumbled in the desk for paper.

"Poor old Mrs. Haskell, Vin, has gotten into trouble through her wild boy's extravagances, and her place is to be sold, so I told her I would buy it for cash, and let her live in it."

"She cannot live long, as she has consumption, and it is a good property at the price—only four thousand dollars."

Four thousand dollars!

It horrified the planter, for he knew that there was not the fifth of that sum in the bank, when there should have been twenty times as much.

The cunning lawyer saw his trouble, and blandly said:

"Perhaps you would oblige me with the draft, madam, and I will give you the bank notes to send her, as I have that sum with me, and do not think it safe to carry it."

"It will do just as well, judge," and at the words of his wife Vincent Vance gave a sigh of relief, and wrote the draft in favor of the lawyer.

His wife then signed it, and the judge counted out the money from his private purse.

"Thank you, judge; the Spray has to go back again after a load of lumber, and I can send this to Mrs. Haskell, by sailor Ben, who is a most trustworthy servant, judge."

"Doubtless, madam; all of your servants seem to be."

With this compliment to her slave household, Mrs. Vance departed, and her husband gave a sigh of relief that amounted almost to a cry of joy.

"A narrow escape, Vance."

"Judge, you saved me," said the planter in a choking voice.

"I acted for gold, my friend: my generosity always has a solid basis to back it."

"Now what is to be done? You said you had a plan."

"Yes," thoughtfully said the lawyer.

"Tell it me."

"Who holds these mortgages?"

"Henry Ross."

"The rich old bachelor merchant of Baltimore?"

"Yes."

"How are they made out?"

"Secured by notes."

"How mean you?"

"For certain moneys received I gave my notes, secured by the estate."

"The estate is not yours."

"True."

"Then why did Ross take such frail security?"

"How do you mean?"

"He must have known they were worthless without your wife's name."

"He got it."

"Ah! like the bank did?"

"Yes."

"Who knows of this besides yourself and Ross?"

"No one."

"Are you sure?"

"He pledged himself not to put the notes out, but to keep them in his safe."

"Well, he is a man of his word."

"Yes."

"Then I think there can be no trouble."

"How no trouble?"

"Henry Ross lives at his old house out of town?"

"Yes."

"He has but three servants with him?"

"Yes, a butler, cook and coachman."

"They are all old?"

"All three of them."

"There is no other habitation within a quarter of a mile?"

"None."

"Then why do you not get possession of the notes?"

"What!"

"And more too?"

"What?"

"He keeps quite a sum of money in his house."

"In Heaven's name! what do you mean?"

and Vincent Vance had become ghastly pale.

"I mean, my dear unsophisticated friend, that it is a very easy matter to enter that house, kill old Ross and his servants, and get your notes and what money he has."

"No, no; why kill him?"

"Dead men keep secrets."

"But why need it be known who does the deed?"

"If he loses your notes by robbery he will make known what was stolen from him: you are a fast man: men suspect you are in trouble for money, and—well you know all that I would say."

"Harvey Rupert you are as cunning as a snake."

"Thank you for the praise you give me, and I will add as venomous if I have to strike at a foe."

"But what do you say to the work?"

"I cannot do it."

"Lost your nerve?"

"I can neither kill nor rob."

"Where there is danger. Well, I will hire it done."

"Be careful."

"Oh! I would be hot on the trail of the hirer, and he would not live after accomplishing the deed. It is the best way to keep secrets, Vance."

The planter shuddered, for, vile as he was, this man was even worse, and possessed a courage to face any danger and meet any foe.

"Well, you will do the work?"

"Have it done, Vance, so go up to town with me, and you can return with a heart at peace, as far as the notes go; but you must pay for the work."

"I have no money."

"I'll take your note, Vance, for what I want for the job, at three years, indorsed by your wife—"

"My wife!"

"Yes; you can write her name, you know, and in the time you can pay off the sum and put money in the bank off of the profits of the plantation."

"And what sum do you want?"

"Call it ten thousand."

"Never!"

"Then our business being at an end, kindly order your carriage for me to drive to the village and catch the up stage."

"I will pay it."

"Enough. Now show me your estate, for I have an idea I will one day own it," and the lawyer smiled as blandly as though he had paid the master of Graylands a compliment.

CHAPTER XVIII.

REDEEMED.

Ross MANOR was an elegant old home in Revolutionary days, for the brick that it was built with were brought from England, and it was a structure erected to withstand for ages the touches of time.

Its family, however, had not been a long-lived one, and, though they had wealth, seldom had they enjoyed happiness.

Some said that a crime dogged their name; but, be that as it may, a number had died on the battle-field, in sea fights, or in duels, until one only remained to represent the name, and he came to America and built Ross Manor.

He married an American maiden, and just after the birth of a son was shot in a duel, thereby carrying out the destiny of his name never to die in a bed.

That son, born just before the death of his father, was Henry Ross, who grew to manhood somewhat soured with the world and turned his attention wholly to business, in a short time doubling his wealth.

In bachelor loneliness he had lived in the mansion built by his father, with only three old servants around him, and occupying but one wing of the building, allowing the remainder to remain in solitude.

This man, who had stepped across the threshold of half a hundred years, was seated in his pleasant rooms the second night following the day upon which the cunning lawyer and evil planter had plotted against him.

He had had his cup of tea and plate of toast, and the butler had gone to the kitchen to gossip with the cook and coachman, as had been his wont for years.

Presently there came a knock at the front door, and it brought the three negroes to their feet, for their master seldom received visitors, and never at night.

The large brass knocker had been handled in a style that showed the one without wished to be heard within, and the three domestics went in single file, the butler leading, to open the door.

"Who are you?" was the cautious question.

"I desire to see Mr. Ross on a matter of business," was the reply in a pleasant voice.

The door was opened, and out of the darkness into the light stepped a slender form.

"Who shall I say, sir?" asked the butler politely, while the coachman and cook, not seeing anything to fear in the visitor, retreated below stairs once more.

"A messenger from Planter Vincent Vance."

The butler departed, and soon returned to usher the visitor into the presence of his master.

Henry Ross glanced up from a book he was reading to behold before him an exceedingly handsome youth of perhaps eighteen.

His form was slender, slightly below the medium height and well-knit, and he was dressed plainly but well.

His face however, riveted the gaze of Henry Ross by its almost womanly beauty, and there was that in it that commanded instant respect.

"Well, young man, be seated, and say how I can serve you?"

"I come from Mr. Vincent Vance, sir."

"Ah! he doubtless wants money on another note; I fear he is going it too fast," muttered Mr. Ross, while aloud he said:

"And what does he want, young sir?"

"He has sent me to redeem the notes you hold of his."

"Indeed? then his speculations he told me he was entering upon have turned out well?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you wish to take them up to-night?"

"Yes, sir, for I have the bank-notes."

"You risk a great deal to carry such a sum with you, young man."

"Yes, Mr. Ross, but I was sent by Mr. Vance, and he trusted me."

"And I would trust your face, sir, at any time; but I mean there are dangerous men on the watch always to rob, and your life would be worthless did they know you had such a sum."

"I do not doubt it, sir; and I wish now to warn you of danger."

"Me! why, what danger threatens me?"

"There is a plot to enter your house at night, within the next few nights, I am confident, and rob you."

"Ha! how know you this?" and Henry Ross fixed his keen eyes upon the youth.

"I overheard two men enter into the plot, sir, but I was so situated that I could not learn all that they said, yet I hope you will not disregard my warning," and the youth spoke earnestly.

"I will not disregard it; but when did you hear this, and where?"

"The bell-rope is in the next room against the mantle; will you give it a pull to call my coachman, please?"

The youth crossed the floor, passed through an open door into a dimly-lighted room, and had his hand stretched forth to seize the bell-rope, when there came a ringing report, a groan and a heavy fall.

One bound and he glanced into the room he had left, to see two men dart in, one holding a smoking pistol in his hand, and the other clutching the bank-notes, while Harry Ross lay dead upon the floor.

"Harvey Rupert, give me those bills!" sternly cried the second man.

"Never! they are mine, for I did the deed. You can take your notes."

"By Heaven! I will have the money too," and there came another ringing shot, and the man fired upon staggered back.

Clutching the mask from his face, that of Harvey Rupert, the judge, was revealed. But he could utter no cry, and sunk in his tracks.

Eagerly the assassin tore from his now pulseless hands the notes, and then bounded toward the still open closet and iron box.

"Great God! they are gone! the notes are gone! they may be elsewhere in this old rookery, and if so they shall never see the light."

As he spoke he too dragged his mask from his face, and the countenance of Vincent Vance, white, haggard and scared was revealed.

Seizing a lamp he held the flame to the window curtains, the bed-clothing, and then dashed it upon the floor and darted from the room.

All this the youth had been a silent witness to, not raising a hand to prevent, even if he could have prevented what had occurred, so swiftly did all transpire.

But, as the flames darted like fiery serpents up the curtains and over the bed, at the same time skurrying in burning waves across the floor, he too bounded away and disappeared, while below stairs the three old gossiping servants gossiped on, until they were at last aroused from voices without, and dashed from their cosey kitchen to find their home in flames and their master dead, for they knew no mortal could be alive in the hell of fire that then enveloped the mansion, which soon after was but a crumbling, smoldering ruin, with no one suspecting the fearful tragedy that had been enacted there, and believing that the lord and master had accidentally set it on fire and perished in it, they left the walls a monument to his memory, for mysteries and strange deaths were not then trailed to the bitter end, as they nowadays are.

CHAPTER XIX.

A VILLAIN'S SOLILOQUY.

A MONTH had passed since the burning of the Ross mansion, and the excitement had died away, with another one to take its place, for Judge Harvey Rupert, the petted lawyer and general favorite, had mysteriously disappeared.

He had returned from a visit to his intimate friend, Vincent Vance, at Graylands Plantation, and had been seen in his office the two days following his return, since which time no one had laid eyes upon him.

It was said his little sail-boat, in which he often amused himself in the bay, had been seen by fishermen going out of the Baltimore harbor the morning following the burning of the Ross Manor, and, as it was not at its moorings, and a storm had followed in the afternoon, the tiny craft, it was believed, had gone down and its distinguished owner had sunk to an untimely grave.

Many mourned him, and his papers being examined by his heirs, they found such large sums marked "charity" that it accounted for the fortune he was supposed to have had and he was looked upon as one of the salt of the earth, and his memory was accordingly revered, as is the case with many evil men of the present generation, who so live that their sins never find them out, and their supposed virtues are engraven upon their tombstones.

And for the first part of that month Vincent Vance had lived in mental anguish, for daily had he expected the clouds to burst.

To be ready to fly, should the stroke come, he had remained in Baltimore, watching and waiting, and each day he felt relieved as he knew that Henry Ross had been left to his grave in the ashes and no one appeared with his notes against him.

To throw suspicion upon Judge Rupert, of having been lost in the Chesapeake, the night he fled from the burning mansion, he had gone down to the harbor, taken the lawyer's boat, which he knew well, and with a small skiff drawn on board, had set sail just before dawn.

It was his intention to watch his chance, when no vessel was in sight, scuttle the craft, and then run ashore.

But the coming up of the storm aided him, and opening the seams he let the tiller go free, got into the skiff, and turned the sail-boat adrift.

He was barely in time, for he had not gotten within a hundred yards of the shore, when the storm struck the sail-boat, sent it over and down,

and swamping his skiff, he was compelled to swim for his life.

A hard struggle it was, and he believed that death was upon him; but at last he reached the shore, and trudged on foot to Baltimore, arriving there foot-sore, weary, and with a dread of coming danger.

But no papers had been found among the lawyer's effects to criminate him, nothing had been brought up to prove that he had had any business transactions with Henry Ross, and at last Vincent Vance felt a weight removed from him.

Then to the bank he went, deposited the amount he had drawn out by drafts with his wife's name forged upon them, and swearing never to gamble again, he started for Graylands.

He had written his wife, explaining that he remained to aid in the search for his dear friend Rupert, and she was not alarmed about him.

At length he reached Graylands, received an almost affectionate greeting from Mrs. Vance, and a warm one from Zitelle, whose love for him was but second to his idolatry to her, and gave a sigh of relief.

Seated out upon the broad veranda the following afternoon, watching a schooner of rakish build and trim rig, tacking slowly up the bay under a light breeze, he muttered:

"Well, my mind is at rest in regard to my debts; would to God I could drive away the memories that haunt me, for I see that old ruin waking and sleeping, as that accursed Gipsy King said I would, and the white face of Queena Gray upturned and cold in that gloomy chamber.

"By Heaven! but I was cruelly avenged upon her, and if I can ever lay hands on that brother of hers he shall go too.

"I am no fool to let him come and drive me and my wife and child out of this home, no, no, Zitelle shall never be a beggar, but a queen among women.

"I have sinned, but she shall never know it.

"Where can that youth, Horace Gray, have gone?

"He has not carried out his threat, and if he does he cannot harm me personally, though he may force us to give up Graylands to him.

"Curse him! he shall never have it, and I believe he will not show himself here again; if he does, he shall die.

"My list is increasing, and each one blunts my conscience more.

"It nearly killed me when we—that is, Rupert—murdered old Day for his money.

"Then I thought I would commit suicide crossing the ocean, to shut out that old ruin in Spain, and Queena lying dead in it.

"I am a veritable coward, but I am improving, and hardly knew myself when I volunteered to go with Rupert to the Ross mansion; but when I deliberately killed him, when I saw he was going to take that pile of bank-notes, I was astounded at myself.

"How strange that those bills were the exact sum, interest and all, of my notes, and as crisp as though they had just come from the bank!

"And how that old rookery burned! Harvey Rupert got his burning in this world as well as in the next," and he smiled at his grim joke.

"Charity! charity!" he went on.

"Well, I should not like to depend upon his charity; all these sums marked *charity* in his papers were deposits made in a New York bank, he told me, under an assumed name.

"I wish I kn' w the name and bank, and I would draw them out— Well, my dear, do you wish to speak to me?" and he turned to his wife.

"Yes, Vin, for Dinah, in house-cleaning just now, found this roll of papers in the room occupied by poor Judge Rupert when he was here.

"I glanced at them, and they seem to be bank receipts for sums deposited, doubtless for a client; see here! and here is a letter addressed to the judge.

Vincent Vance took the papers quietly, and said:

"I will look them over and place them in his executors' hands, if they are valuable."

His wife turned away, and then he muttered, with a strange glitter in his eyes:

"I am proud of myself; how calmly I spoke and took these papers, though I saw at a glance they were the deposits marked *charity*; ha! ha! ha! the cunning fox was caught when he left these here."

"Rupert Judge! his own name and title; ha! ha! ha! well, Rupert Judge, I will draw out these deposits, for well can I write your hand."

"Let me see: ten, three, one, thirteen, seven and six—in all *forty thousand dollars*.

"Ha! ha! ha! we will not be beggars after all, Zitelle, if Horace Gray does turn us out of house and home; no, Zitelle, my darling, the game is yet in my hands; ha! this is a letter from a New York ship-builder; what!

"Can build you a schooner that will have no equal on the seas for speed, and will be in every way fitted for a privateer to cruise against British commerce in the war now brewing."

"Why I believe the judge was going to turn pirate; let me see what else says this letter."

"Will arm and equip the vessels as well, and whole cost will be thirty thousand dollars."

"Ha! ha! ha! I may go back to the sea myself, for privateering pays well."

"My dear, scorched Rupert, what do I not owe you?"

"Yes, I have half a mind to turn privateer-man, and—no, no, cannon balls are too uncere-monious, and English tars are not particular who they strike; guess I'll rest content as I am and live for my beautiful Zitelle, for I am getting to be such a villain, I am afraid her mother will not live long."

"No, Zitelle and myself are enough."

"Papa, did you call me?"

The beautiful child had heard her name spoken, and bounded out upon the veranda.

"Yes, my darling; see that pretty vessel."

"Oh papa! she is coming here."

"I do believe she is heading for the inlet; it is a cutter, I think, and some officer on board I know, is doubtless coming to visit me."

"Papa, I do wish I was a boy so I could be a sailor; I do love the sea," said the child with enthusiasm, and then she added:

"Let me run down toward the shore and see the pretty ship."

"Yes, Zitelle, and I will send Nancy to follow you, while papa writes some letters," and Vincent Vance left the veranda, while, with a glad cry, Zitelle bounded away down the gravel path leading to the shore, her eyes fastened upon the trim craft that was now entering the inlet that formed the little harbor of Graylands.

CHAPTER XX.

NOT FORGOTTEN.

VINCENT VANCE, engaged in writing his letters, to get off to the village in time for the stage to Baltimore, had forgotten all about the rakish looking schooner he had seen coming into the inlet, until a wild cry startled him from his occupation.

He sprung to his feet in alarm, and started beyond his self-command leaned on his chair for support.

"Oh massa! massa! come, sir, oh come!"

"It is Nancy's voice; some ill has befallen my child," he groaned, and, as a shriek came from his wife, who had rushed from her rooms, he, by a violent effort gained his self-control, and bounded toward the veranda.

There a scene met his gaze, and word reached his ears that filled him with terror, and caused him to reel against one of the columns of the veranda for support.

Upon the steps lay the form of his wife, unconscious, and bending over her was her maid, Sue, while Nancy, Zitelle's nurse, was rocking herself to and fro from one foot to the other and moaning:

"Poor Missy Zitelle! poor Missy Zitelle!"

Unheeding the prostrate form of his wife, Vincent Vance cried in piteous tones:

"My child! oh, my child!"

"Yonder, massa, yonder in de ship," shrieked Nancy, pointing to the schooner which was just then putting about to sail from the inlet.

"The schooner! my child on that vessel?" he gasped forth.

"Fact, massa! 'fore God, it am a fact; she ran down to de shoo', an' as you tolle me, I folle'd her; but afore I got dar dey jist land from a boat and tuk her on board.

"I call 'em ter come back, but dey laff, an' den I run up fer you, massa, an' dat all I know," and Nancy again began her wailing, while the other house-servants, gathered by her cries, came rushing out in alarm.

"See to your mistress, Sue," cried Vincent Vance, and he bounded down to the shore.

The schooner had evidently dropped anchor upon entering; but on seeing the child had sent a boat ashore, seized her, and then gotten under way again immediately.

She was not very far away when Vincent Vance reached the shore, and in ringing tones he hailed:

"Schooner, ahoy! ahoy!"

A mocking laugh came back over the waters in reply.

"Curse you! why have you taken my child?"

Again the response was a mocking laugh.

"Bring back my child, or I will hunt you to the ends of the earth!"

The same scornful laughter came, and the grief-maddened planter turned away, an object of pity to the sorrowing servants who had followed him and gathered around him.

"Here suthin' massa; it were stickin' in the sand," and a negro handed him a dagger, which had been stuck through a piece of paper and then dropped on the sand.

It was seized eagerly by the trembling hands of Vincent Vance, and unfolding the paper he tottered and almost fell at what he saw there.

"Help me to the house, James; and mind you all, not a word about finding this dagger, to your mistress or to any one."

He slowly went toward the house, for he seemed wholly unnerved, and turned every few steps to gaze upon the receding schooner.

At last he reached the veranda, sunk down in a chair, and was told by a servant that his mis-

tress was still in a swoon, and that the doctor had been sent for.

"Go, and leave me to my own misery," he ordered, and the slave departed.

Then, from his pocket he drew the dagger and paper.

The former had a gold hilt, a long, narrow blade, and no distinguishing mark upon it.

The latter he unfolded and read in a low, mumbling tone:

"OFF GRAYLANDS PLANTATION.

"VINGENT VANCE:

"SIR: You thought you were forgotten, but my visit to-day will prove to you that you are unforgotten.

"You intended faithfully to kill me, but I thwarted you by knowing the old mansion, which my curiosity caused me to learn so well in childhood, with all its crooks, crannies, and secret passages.

"When you visited the prison wing I saw you: when you sat in your library plotting, I was near you in the wall, and I heard all.

"Your wife's jewels I took, for I knew how the iron chest could be opened without a key; but I returned them, with a trinket I had in my possession and cared not for.

"I took up your notes held by Henry Ross, so you see I am not poor.

"The money I paid him to redeem them, I saw you kill Harvey Rupert to get possession of, for I was in the next room.

"I also saw you set fire to the house and fly for your life. I could have killed you then, but I preferred that you should live.

"Your sail-boat scheme to account for Judge Rupert's death, the public took as true; but I know better.

"I could claim my property in law, but I prefer to let you have it and make you suffer.

"Your notes, with your wife's name forged upon them, are in my possession, as are the secrets of your life.

"And now I intend to strike another blow, and through your child whom you idolize.

"I am heading for my home to drop anchor in the inlet near Graylands, and to take from you your Zitelle.

"If you wish her seek her on the high seas.

"If you wish to escape my revenge, hunt me down and kill me.

"HORACE GRAY."

Then, written in a hurry evidently, was as follows:

"P. S.—I have captured your beautiful child, Zitelle. Mark well my vessel, so that you will know should you cross her path, or desire to find her.

"HORACE GRAY OF GRAYLANDS."

"By the God above! I will mark well his schooner: I will hunt him down, for by taking my child, my beautiful Zitelle, he has aroused the bloodhound in my nature, and I will follow him to the bitter end."

He sprung to his feet, seized a glass and bent it long upon the departing schooner.

Then, when his eyes grew dim from the strain, he lowered it, and called for a servant.

"Well, massa?"

"Order the carriage at once, James, and tell Roe to pack my trunk."

"Yes, massa. How am missus, sir?"

"Go and obey me at once," and he ascended to his wife's room.

She was still in a swoon, but the doctor arriving he restored her to consciousness, and half an hour after Vincent Vance drove away from Graylands, having already formed his plan of action, by which he was determined to regain Zitelle and also consummate a terrible revenge upon the one who had stolen her from him, and who, by knowing his secret life, held him so completely in his power.

What that resolve was, the reader will discover, after I have in the next few chapters, brought back before them, other characters that have figured in my romance.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GIPSIES OF THE SEA.

UPON a point of land, jutting out into the Chesapeake Bay, and with the St. Michael's river behind it, was a wild scene, for beneath the spreading oaks was an encampment.

Although the tocsin of war had resounded through the land, calling patriotic Americans to rally and defend their country against Great Britain, it was not a bivouac of soldiers, or of sailors, though a number of vessels were at anchor near by in the little bay to the south.

But it was an encampment of Gipsies.

Their dark faces and picturesquely clad forms were seen beneath the spreading branches of the oaks, and a wild, fierce looking people they were.

Their tents were of canvas, covered with innumerable symbols, painted in red, blue and black, and they were arranged in a semicircle with the precision of a military camp.

At either end of the tents was a small field-piece, a six-pounder, and around each one of them were stands of arms ready for use.

In the center of the semicircle were two tents larger than the others, and one of these was literally covered with devices of a most hideous kind.

The other was unmarked, and above it was flying a flag with a black field and a red dagger in the center.

Back of the tents were the group of Gipsies, fully three hundred in number, including men, women and children.

And here too were the camp-fires, before which hung their pots for cooking, and around which the hungry members of the tribe were gathered.

One gazing upon the Gipsy camp as it was, would have been struck with the air of military discipline that pervaded it, and then with the circumstance that out of over three hundred souls, only about a third of them were women and children, the remainder being men of a type of physical manhood any nation might be proud of.

They were as darkly bronzed as Indians, dressed in a picturesque garb, half sailor, half Mexican, were all armed to the teeth, and their fierce looks indicated a dangerous body of men to meet in combat.

The women too were armed, and a number of them were really beautiful in face and form.

Hardly a hundred paces from the encampment was the little bay, jutting in from the St. Michael's river, and here were anchored a fleet of as trim-looking craft as ever skimmed the waters under sail.

They were all schooners, thirteen in number, and ranged from twenty tons to one hundred, the average being about sixty, and but one larger.

That exception was a beautiful craft in build, her hull being long, lying low in the water, and as gaunt as a hungry tiger.

Her masts were single sticks, rose to a great height, raked sufficient to please the most fault-finding cutthroat pirate, and carried canvas enough one would think, if all was set, to run her under in a six-knot breeze.

Not a soul was visible upon her decks, but every rope was in order, every sail neatly furled and every block in its place.

She was also armed, carrying seven guns, two of which, a bow and stern pivot gun, were of large caliber.

At the halyards running to the mizzen truck, was flying a flag acknowledged by no nation, for it was the same that fluttered above the large tent on shore, and at the fore was the stars and stripes, and all the other vessels showed the same colors.

The other craft, though not as large, were also of perfect model and rig, and one glancing over the fleet, who had a sailor's eye, would say they could fly like the wind in a good breeze, and weather a gale like a line-of-battle ship.

The other vessels, like the large schooner, were painted black, even to their masts and yards, and had a red ribbon running around the hulls, which relieved their somberness in a great degree.

They were also armed, though mostly with guns of small caliber, and the smallest craft of the fleet, carried but two cannon, a bow and stern chaser.

Upon the whole fleet not a human being was visible, all of their crews evidently being in the encampment.

Such were the Gipsies of the Sea, and their rakish fleet, which had for a year or more carried the roving race from land to land, until at last they came, like a flock of pigeons, to the shores of America, to fulfill the destiny that led them through life.

CHAPTER XXII.

A KING'S REMORSE.

A MAN stood upon the shore, just in the shadows of the forest, and gazing out upon the moonlit bay spread out before him.

In his rear was the wooded point of land on which the camp of the Sea Gipsies had been pitched, and the light of their fires, and glimmer of their tents were visible in the distance.

Beyond these were the vessels at anchor in the little basin, and before him rolled the majestic Chesapeake.

He was a man of tall stature, wore a cloak over his shoulders, and, as he stepped out into the moonlight to get a better look at a sail far out on the bay, the face of Chandos the Gipsy King was revealed.

His look was darker, and even more stern than when the reader last beheld him in his encampment near the Haunted Ruin in Spain, and now, as he stood there in silence, his brow was contracted, his lips compressed, as though his thoughts were gloomy.

Presently his lips parted and he muttered:

"I was a fool to love one not of my race, and to believe that I could win her love."

"She became my bride simply because she loved revenge more than she abhorred me, and was content to bind herself to me to wreak her vengeance upon one of her own race who had so wronged her."

"And from that moment the king has been a figure-head and the queen has ruled, and today the tribe fear her and love her more than they do me."

"Bah! that I should have been such a fool."

"My jewels went to build vessels, our tribe became sailors, sea children, instead of remaining as we were, a roving race of the forests."

"And for what?"

"To enable the Gipsy Queen to worry the life out of a man from revenge."

"Why not drive a knife to his heart and thus end his life?"

"That is the Gipsy way; but she is no Gipsy; she comes of a civilized race and her refined cruelty surpasses the murderous knife of the forest child."

"And now what is to be done in this war that is bursting upon this land, for our little fleet will be hunted down by the cruisers and destroyed, and the King Chandos Gipsies will be wiped off the earth and sea."

"I have consulted Nana, the Fate Queen, but she says the stars are silent to her, and she knows not what will come."

"Oh! that I had not let poor Nunah die, and that to-day she were my bride!"

He buried his face in his hands and groaned aloud, for he felt that the Gipsy Queen had come to rule the king.

From the day of her marriage to King Chandos, Queena Gray had become a changed being.

She knew that he would kill her if she refused to be his wife; but it was not the fear of death, for, under ordinary circumstances, death would have been preferable to being dragged down from the height she had held to become the wife of a Gipsy.

But her nature was a strange one, and beneath her beauty and good traits, slumbered a volcano of passion, which the act of Vincent Gray toward her, caused to burst forth in fury, and turn its fiery course toward one aim—revenge on the man who had wronged her.

In busy action was her only refuge from maddening thought, and she set to work to engraft herself in the hearts of the wild tribe of which she was queen.

Was one ill, she remained daily and nightly by the bedside; she improved their mode of living and in fact won them over completely.

To the king she was ever polite, yet cold, and yet she soon gained an ascendancy over him that made him succumb to her slightest wish.

To keep busy, Queena had proposed that the tribe should give up their horses and wagons, for vessels.

With the one they could only go slowly over the land; with the other they could sail over all seas, trading here and there, and still camp in many lands.

The tribe was a rich one, and swayed by their queen, and the moody acquiescence of their king, they went to a seaport, chartered a vessel and sailed for the New World.

On a picturesque island on the Maine coast they landed, and there they began their shipbuilding, and one by one the vessels of the little fleet were launched and equipped.

Under the tutorage of Maine coasters they became skillful sailors, and at last their fleet was ready for sea.

Other Gipsy wanderers had sought admission to their tribe, which swelled their numbers, until King Chandos really felt proud of his flotilla and his command.

With jealous eye the people on the coast, and the cruisers of both America and England had watched their growing strength, and wondered how it would all end.

Some said they were smugglers, others even called them pirates, while many more claimed that they would become buccaneers eventually.

But they claimed to be only Gipsy fishermen, with a fishing fleet, and not one act of outlawry could be traced to them.

One night the little fleet set sail from the island though still leaving upon it their cabins and many of the old and decrepit of their tribe.

Whither it had gone none knew, other than those who remained on the island, and they cared not to tell; but out at sea a few leagues a large vessel was signaled, the fleet hovered around it, and within a few hours' time the Gipsy flotilla was armed thoroughly, and once more sailed on its way.

From one land to another they drifted aimlessly, it seemed, until at last the snowy fleet swooped down upon the Chesapeake, and the crews landed and formed their encampment.

And had they no motive in this?

Yes, their tireless, resolute, daring queen, had never forgotten for one moment Vincent Vance.

Queen of a Gipsy tribe, and outcast from those she had known, and her own race and land, she had determined to drown thought in action, and become indeed a queen among women.

She knew that her cousin, Violet Gray, had inherited her fortune and that Vincent Vance had made her his wife, thus, through her supposed death, at his instigation, gaining the fortune he had sought to win through her.

With each year that passed she had but added to her hatred of him and of his wife, and thirsted the more for revenge.

But she had allowed them to live on in peace and security until she was ready to strike, and then inch by inch she would torture the life out of Vincent Vance and bring sorrow upon his family.

Thus, at last, the Gipsies of the sea dropped anchor not far from the home of Vincent Vance, and the wheel of revenge began to grind slowly, but surely.

All this did Chandos, the Gipsy King, think over as he stood there on the Chesapeake's shores that night, gazing out upon the moonlit waters,

and he realized fully that the queen ruled the king, and from his lips broke the cry, ending almost in a wail:

"Oh, Nunah, my beautiful girl of the Roving Race, would that my cruel words had not sent you to your grave."

"Then, Nunah, joy and sunshine would still rest in my heart."

"Who calls Nunah, the Gipsy?"

The voice was hoarse and trembling, and starting back, Chandos, the King, beheld the bent form of Nana, the Fate Queen, before him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE GIPSY KING'S OATH.

"Who called the name of dead Nunah?" The Fate Queen repeated her question, and looked the Gipsy King squarely in the face.

"I spoke it not, Nana, though it was in my thoughts; you are indeed a reader of the human face," answered Chandos, who had not known that he had really spoken aloud.

"I read the faces as I do the stars; but Chandos, King of the Gipsies, what would you with the dead?"

"Naught would I, good Nana, for the flesh of poor Nunah has crumbled to dust, her eyes no longer glimmer with life, and I would turn from her skeleton form with fear," he said, sadly.

"Why didst thou cause her to die, king?"

"Our law held that one must die."

"True, had you deserted her, or not wedded her on the day set. But why didst thou not make Nunah thy bride?"

"Thou well knowest, Nana."

"Answer me!" was the commanding speech of the woman.

"I was fascinated with one I had been hired to slay."

"Fascinated; you loved her."

"No, Nana, I loved her not, though I thought I did; it was fascination only, for, since our little Zitelle was born, I care not for her."

"And yet she rules you as a subject."

"Hold! say not that to me, woman."

"I do say it: she holds you with her iron will."

"It is a power she has, Nana, and I dare not resist her will; but never breathe it to others."

"Others are not blind, king."

"Ha!"

"I mean it."

"My people know?"

"They see your weakness."

"And yet I love her not."

"You love your child."

"Ay, with all my heart," he said, fiercely.

"And not its mother."

"Strange."

"Stay, Nana, and I will confess to you, for I believe you can read my heart: I hate Queena as much as I love Zitelle, my child."

"And yet she rules you."

"I fear her too."

"Bah! you, Chandos the Gipsy King, fear a woman?" said the Fate Queen, with a sneer.

"Nana, listen to me: you know that I fear not death, and I would die by my own hand did not the curse fall upon my tribe, for I am very unhappy; but I do fear Queena, as she would kill my child did I not obey."

"Did she strike at me I would not care; but the idol of my heart must not die."

"And this is the woman you cast off Nunah for?"

"Poor Nunah!" he sighed.

"Nunah loved you."

"Ay, and I loved her; ay, love her memory this night even more than I do my Zitelle."

The Fate Queen gazed fixedly into his face for full a moment, and silence fell between them.

Then Nana said in a low tone:

"Nunah's death haunts you, King Chandos."

"Ay, waking and sleeping," he said, earnestly.

"What would you give to see her again as of old?"

"What would I not give, woman?"

"But you are married."

"It matters not; I would see her were I thrice married could she come back to life."

"What would you do, king, to have her come back to life?"

"Bah! why trifle with me?"

"I do not trifle, king; I ask what would you do to have Nunah back?"

"She cannot, alas!"

"Answer me."

"I would do anything, everything."

"Would you take life?"

"Ay, would I."

"Would you sacrifice the queen?"

"By Heaven! woman, you are in a strange humor this night," he said, in a sneering tone.

"I have power you know not of, King Chandos, and I ask you, if the queen's death would bring back Nunah from the grave, would you take her life?"

He trembled violently, she keenly watching him the while, and then he muttered:

"She is Zitelle's mother."

"Then you love the mother of your child, the

daughter of a strange race, whom you brought into your tribe, against the knowledge of your people, who believed her a Gipsy—I say you love her more than you do Nunah!"

"No, a thousand times no."

"Would you do for Nunah what you made Nunah do for Queena?"

"What do you mean?"

"Nunah took her own life that you might have another bride!"

"Yes."

"Would you take the Queena's life to bring back Nunah from the grave?"

He was silent a moment; and then he said in deep, solemn tones:

"Yes I would, sorceress."

"Prove it, king."

"How can I?"

"Do you believe in my power?"

"Yes."

"Wholly?"

"Yes, Nana."

"Listen then and then decide how you will act."

"I will hear, Nana."

"This woman—"

"Hold! don't get angry, because I call your queen a woman; I say this woman, *you* and I know is an American!"

"Sh—let not the winds waft it to my people."

"She seeks revenge upon one who cruelly wronged her, does she not?"

"She does."

"She married you to gain that revenge?"

"Yes."

"She hates you."

"I believe it."

"She has changed the lives of your people, turned them from children of the forest into children of the sea, and has impoverished the tribe."

"She has, for our savings are all nearly gone."

"She says she will soon bring you riches; do you believe her?"

"She says so."

"True, and how?"

"I know not."

"I do."

"You?"

"Yes, king; she is an American, and her whole sympathy is with this land in its war."

"You and I, our people acknowledge no land; but we are to be sacrificed for America."

"How mean you, Nana?"

"She will lead the fleet against the British vessels, and in action many of our people will fall."

"We may gain riches, but few will live to enjoy them."

"How know you this, Nana?"

"I read it in the stars; it comes to me upon the invisible wind; I feel it, I know it, for my power is great, king."

"I feel that it is, Nana."

"Now, to save your people will you not take the life of your queen, that you may lead them back to their old-time ways, and make them once more children of the forest?"

"No, Nana, I will let them follow her where they will."

The Fate Queen remained silent for a while, and then asked in a low tone:

"To restore Nunah to life; to behold her as she once was, loving you with all her heart, would you not kill the Gipsy Queen?"

"Yes."

"You mean it?"

"I do."

"By the Gipsy's oath you swear it?"

"I do."

"Enough; come to this spot the third night from this, when the moon rises from yonder bay, and, if your queen is dead by your hand, remember, call thrice:

"Nunah! Nunah! Nunah!"

"Well, Nana?" he asked, eagerly.

"She will come to you."

"Nunah will come?"

"Yes."

"As a spirit?"

"No."

"Not my own Nunah?" he said, in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes, Nunah as she was the night you bade her take her own life."

"Nana, have you this power?" he asked, in awe of her.

"Do as I command and you shall know."

"Nana, Zitelle's mother, the queen shall die," he said, in a low, savage tone, and drawing his cloak around him he strode back toward the encampment.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CUP OF DEATH.

In the larger of the tents of the Gipsy encampment, on the afternoon of the third day, following the strange promise of the Fate Queen to Chandos the Gipsy King, there sat a woman, her head bent low, and her whole attitude that of deep thought or dejection.

Her dress was of scarlet velvet, trimmed with gold lace, and the skirt was short, falling just below the knees, where it met leggings of silk, that extended to a small boot, that was well-made and shapely.

The bodice fitted tight to the small waist and well-rounded bust, and was cut *a la pompadour*, so that a neck of snowy whiteness was half concealed beneath necklaces of gems of rare value.

Her arms were bare to the shoulder, and encircled by massive bands of solid gold worn above and below the elbow, and her hair, inky in hue, was confined by a comb of pearls, while a soft hat, ornamented with white, crimson and black plumes, sat jauntily upon her head.

In a scarf around her waist were visible the pearl butts of two small pistols, and the jeweled hilt of a dagger.

She was seated upon a rustic chair, her hands clasped in her lap, and her face bent down as though in deepest meditation.

Suddenly, into the handsomely furnished tent, that looked like the marquee of some military chieftain, bounded a little child of five years of age.

Then the woman looked up, and once more the reader is face to face with the Queen of the Gipsies, she that was Queena Gray.

Then as beautiful as a picture, she had changed even for the better, and her lovely haughty face had become imperial and grand.

Bronzed by the wild life she led, in perfect health, and with eyes that made one feel their every glance, she was a woman to win and break hearts, to rule men as her slaves.

But the haughtiness of her face died away, her eyes softened as she turned them upon her child, the very counterpart of herself, and dressed also as was her mother.

"What wishes my sweet Zitelle?" asked the Gipsy Queen in her low, musical voice, that could yet rise in anger and command to trumpet tones.

"Zita love mamma," lisped the child, and, with an impulse, born of her passionate love for her child, the woman seized the little one in her arms and held her to her bosom with a force that made her cry out with pain.

Just then into the tent strode the tall form of Chandos the Gipsy, and he said quietly, addressing the child:

"Go, Zitelle, to the camps, and ask them there to show you the pretty ships."

"Is the child in your way?" imperiously asked the woman.

"No, but I would speak with you."

Zitelle ran out of the tent, and the Gipsy Queen asked calmly:

"Well, what has Chandos, the King of the Gipsies, to say?"

"I would say, Queena, that to-day is the anniversary of the night you became the Gipsy Queen."

"Indeed! your memory is good," she said with sarcasm.

"By Gipsy law, Queena," he continued, not noticing her manner, "it is the duty of the king and queen of the tribe, to pray forgiveness of each other for every wrong done, every word of anger uttered to each other, and to pledge themselves anew in the Cup of Hope."

"Will you that we so do?"

"If it is your law, why not?"

"I am your wife, yet, as you know I do not love you; I had hoped to do so, or feared that I would do so, but you are built in the image of your creator, a magnificent man, with the soul left out, and a stone where the heart should have been."</

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SPECTER.

WHEN Chandos the Gipsy left the tent where he had drank with the queen the Cup of Hope, he wended his way toward the beach.

The sun had just set, and twilight following, he stood looking over the restless waters until it was too dark to see any charm in them.

Then he wended his way to the spot beyond the forest where he was to meet the one whom he told the sorceress he would kill the queen to have come back to life.

Since her meeting with the king on the shore, the Fate Queen had kept closely to her tent, and few had seen her.

Several times the Gipsy King had gone there to talk with her more regarding her promise, but only once had she seen him, and then said sternly:

"All that can be said, king, has been said; it remains to act now."

"Keep your oath, and I will my pledge."

Nervously he had turned away, and he seemed surrounded by sorrow one moment, hope the next, and then fear, until the time for action arrived.

Then the Fate Queen sent for him, and asked:

"Will you keep your word?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"To-night."

"How?"

"He pointed to his knife.

But she shook her head, and said:

"No, there is a better way."

"How?"

"This is the anniversary of your marriage."

"Ha!"

"Your sixth year."

"I had forgotten it."

"I had not."

"Well."

"Drink the Cup of Hope with her."

"It would be but mockery."

"I will prepare the cups."

"Ah! I understand you; so be it."

"Send for them when needed."

The king nodded and walked away, and the Fate Queen set about her hellish work.

Fearlessly, mercilessly he had drank with the Gipsy Queen the Cup of Hope, and then, uncaring for her fate, had relentlessly waited for the time to have the Fate Queen keep her pledge to him.

As he stood there in the shadow of the forest, gazing eagerly to the eastern horizon and watching for the rising of the moon, he murmured aloud:

"Well, the deed is done, and now once more I am king other than in name."

"All believed that I loved her, and none will believe that I put poison in her cup."

"But Nunah?"

"Ah! I will keep her hidden for awhile, and then summon the Fate Queen to raise me up a maiden for my wife, and with her incantations she can bring me back Nunah, and all will be well."

"But can she keep her pledge?

"It is said the Fate Queens can do anything they wish, and Nana is a strange woman and has done wonderful things, and may bring back Nunah to life."

"I have heard of drugs given the dead that keep them in perfect life, and so it must be with my beautiful dead bride."

"But will her heart be as warm after it has been for six years in the grave?"

"I hope so; if not, I shall seek good Nana's aid."

"And then, with beautiful Nunah for my bride, I will fly far from here, and once more we will become roving children of the forest—ha! the sky grows golden."

"Yes, the moon is rising."

He trembled violently, for his ignorant, superstitious nature caused him to feel that the Fate Queen had the power she claimed, and that soon he must behold her he loved.

Brighter and brighter grew the sky, until at last, above the horizon arose a bright object, and then up sailed the ring that mocked the moon.

"Nunah! Nunah! Nunah!"

He almost shrieked the name, and he leaned against the tree at his side for support.

"I come!"

The voice came from far out upon the moonlit waters, and gazing there he saw a small canoe, snowy white, and in it a form clad in white.

It was coming toward the shore.

It would land almost at his feet.

He heard the dash of the paddle, and saw the arms that moved it.

He would meet her at the beach.

But his knees failed him, and, strong man that he was, he sunk down upon the sward, watching and waiting.

Nearer and nearer came the canoe, and again he called out:

"Nunah!"

"I come, King of the Gipsies."

The answer came across the waters, and added new strength to him, and again he sprung to his feet.

A moment more and the canoe had touched the shore, a white form sprung out upon the sands, and Chandos the King bounded forward to meet it.

Then, as he was about to clasp her in his arms, the white robe was thrown off, and the woman stood revealed in all her grand, imperious beauty.

With a cry of horror he started back, tottered, reeled and fell in a deep swoon upon the sands.

It was Queena the Gipsy Queen that stood before him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ACCUSED.

WHEN Chandos the King of the Gipsies recovered consciousness, he was startled at the scene around him.

For a moment he did not recall all that had passed; but soon there came back to him the remembrance of the cruel hoax that had been put upon him by the Fate Queen.

At first it was his intention to spring to his feet and wreak a fearful vengeance upon the sorceress; but one glance around him and even his reckless, daring spirit was awed.

What he saw was a row of torches, thirteen in number, and he knew that they were called the "Death Lights" by his people.

Opposite this row of torches stood thirteen forms, clothed in black, and their faces hidden beneath masks.

These were the Death Judges; but whether men or women of the tribe none knew.

He understood the way they were summoned.

All in the tribe who were of age—eighteen being the number of years to pass to reach manhood and womanhood among the tribe—had drawn from a bag to see upon whom the black balls fell.

There were thirteen of these ominous-looking balls, and those drawing them kept the secret from the tribe, but went quietly away, donned the death-garball had in their tents, and assembled in the center of the camp.

The king and the queen were the only ones who had authority to order this drawing of the death lottery, and the king knew that he had not done so.

Of course then the queen had, and he looked around, as he arose to his feet, to see if she was present.

Soon she came, dressed in deepest black, and took her stand before the torches, while she pointed toward him.

Calm, with folded arms, he stood, but his face was pallid, and his teeth set.

He spoke no word then, for he was a true Gipsy, and knew well that one accused had no right to utter a word.

"Death Judges, I called you here, I, Queena, your queen."

The voice of the queen was calm, and her words fell distinctly on the ears of the tribunal and king, and even reached the eager yet intent throng grouped back among the trees and watching the dread scene.

"Judges, I bring you before your king, and I, your queen, am his accuser."

Again she paused, and as silent and motionless as black marble statues stood the thirteen Judges.

And as silent and motionless as they stood Chandos, the Gipsy King.

Who were to be his Judges he knew not, other than that they were of his people, and of what he was to be really accused he knew not, yet those thirteen black forms, those thirteen torches told him that it was to be a charge punishable with death; in fact, a crime punishable with death was all that could be brought against a king of the tribe.

"My accusation, Judges, against this man goes back three nights from this."

"I walked to yonder shore ere sunset, reclined among the cedars, and dropped to sleep."

"I was awakened by voices, and beheld before me your king and the one you call the Fate Queen."

"They were speaking of the past, yet plotting for the future."

"I was mentioned in that plot, and, as your king had tired of your queen, she was to die by the king's hand, and in return for it the sorceress was to raise from the grave the Gipsy maiden known as Nunah."

A murmur went down the row of masked Judges, but no one spoke, and Queena continued:

"It was agreed that your king was to take my life, and then, this night at moonrise he was to stand at the same spot on which they plotted and he was to thrice call the name of Nunah."

"Then she was to appear to him, if I had been slain, and she was to be your queen, the king saying that the Fate Queen had raised her from the dead for him."

"I went to my tent, and I read the stars, for I too read men and women, most august Judges, as does the Fate Queen."

"And in those stars I read a strange secret, which soon you shall know."

"Your king, to carry out his part of the deadly work, sought me to-day, this our sixth

anniversary of marriage, and pledged me in the Cup of Hope, which he knew the Fate Queen had already poisoned.

"I knew there was poison in it, but I had an antidote which I took at once and the evil effects passed away, while your king believed me in the sleep of death."

"Then he sought the trysting place, and at his call I answered."

"And more, I rowed to the shore in the very canoe the expected bride was to have gone in."

"But instead of Nunah, he clasped in his arms, it was Queena."

"The shock caused him to swoon away, and I had him brought here, and you, Death Judges, were summoned to try him."

"But there is another for you to try at the same time; wait!"

She glided away, entered the sacred tent of the sorceress, to their horror, and returned leading a form hidden beneath a white robe.

Then, having placed the muffled figure by the side of the king she continued:

"Death Judges, you all remember several years ago, when Nana the Fate Queen departed from the encampment, while we were in England, and remained several weeks?"

They bowed as an answer in the affirmative.

"She said she had gone to the wilderness to gather herbs as medicines."

Again they bowed.

"Well, I tell you here, Death Judges, that when Nana the Queen of Destiny of your tribe left it then, *she died*."

They moved, as if in surprise, yet uttered no word.

"It is the truth; she knew that death was near at hand, and she left on that account."

"In a hovel on the mountains she died, and the one who nursed her in her last days came to this tribe, disguised as Nana, impersonated her, and stands there before you."

She pointed to the muffled form, and even the astonished king turned and gazed upon the unknown form.

Then Queena continued:

"Nana the Fate Queen, breaking the law of your tribe, by night, led by a bloodhound, followed the trail of those who hurried Nunah to her grave."

"She took her from that grave, for she was not dead, but in a deathlike sleep, and restoring her, bade her fly, but keep ever near our people."

"That command Nunah obeyed, and she it was who nursed her grandmother in her last illness, and has been pretending to be your sorceress and plotting for me to die, that she might become your queen."

"Death Judges, I have accused—behold!"

She tore the robe from off the form, and Nunah, as beautiful as ever, defiant and calm, stood revealed.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONDENMED.

THE swaying of the black forms, the exclamations from their stolid lips, the cry of surprise, joy, dread, commingled, from the Gipsy King, Queena both saw and heard, and well knew how her words had fallen.

That she was looked upon as a sorceress, as well as a queen, she well knew, and she cared not to destroy that belief by making known that when nursing the sorceress in her illness, her delirium had betrayed the secret, and her spies had discovered all else.

As for Nunah she stood as stolid as though she was not interested.

She had played her cards well, none doubting but that she was the Fate Queen herself, so perfect was her disguise.

She had lost the game, and would take the consequences.

She loved Queena for herself, and had accepted many kindnesses at her hands: but she hated her because she believed Chandos loved her, because, too, she was the Queen of the Gipsies.

Hating her, she had plotted to destroy her.

She did not believe that she was suspected by Queena, because the king had no idea she was other than Nana.

Therefore, when Queena came into her tent that afternoon, gave her a cup of wine, asking her to drink it, she readily did so, for often had the same kindness been shown her before by the queen.

She had then prepared the Goblet of Hope with poison, then arrayed herself to meet the king, and more she did not remember, as she sunk unconscious in her tent.

Recovering, she found it dark, and then knew that she was bound hand and foot, and glancing out upon the encampment her eyes fell upon the torches and the Judges, with the king in their midst, and then she knew that she had been caught in her own trap, and schooled herself to bear bravely what would come.

As soon as the first emotion was over, at the fearful discovery that had been made, Queena said in her clear, stern tones:

"Death Judges, what is your will upon Chandos your king?"

"Death!"

The word was uttered in chorus, and was strangely solemn in its sound.

But Chandos, the king, neither moved nor spoke.

"Death Judges, once more I ask you, what is your will with this woman?"

"Death!"

As before, the word was breathed with earnest distinctness, and each man who spoke it meant it.

But there came no tremor over the face or form of Nunah, and her gaze never flinched.

"You have heard, Chandos, disgraced King of the Gipsies, what fate has been decided upon."

"And you, Nunah, base traitress, unworthy of the blood of the Roving Race, have heard your doom," said Queena, in a low, solemn tone.

Neither spoke, but both bowed.

"It is for me to pass sentence upon you as to when and how you die."

"To-night I will not do so."

"Place them in irons and confine them on board my vessel, the Merciless."

"Lead them away!"

Four of the Death Judges stepped forward, two placing themselves upon either side of the prisoners, and with the others following, they marched silently away in the direction of the little bay where the Gipsy fleet was at anchor.

As the flickering torches faded in the distance, Queena, wretched, unhappy, revengeful, turned and entered her tent.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TAKING A PRIZE.

A GROUP of men stood talking together in a small port a couple of leagues from the Gipsy encampment.

Their locality was behind a tobacco warehouse, and it was evident they cared not to be seen by any one who might straggle near.

There were a dozen in the group, and that they were awaiting the coming of some one was evident.

At last a quick, firm step was heard, and a man appeared, coming from the village.

He had a cloak around him, although the night was not cool, and walked with the air of one who had an errand of importance to attend to.

"There's the captain now," said several voices in chorus, alluding to the new-comer.

Just then he joined the group, and hearing the remark, said:

"Yes, men, I am here, but a little late; are you all here?"

"All of your boat's crew, sir; the other boats are waiting for us down the river," answered one.

"All told, how many, boatswain?"

"With us twelve, sir, sixty."

"They are sufficient."

"There were about twenty men, sir, come down in a schooner from Baltimore, and went on board the judge's schooner to-night," suggested one.

"My destination is not that way to-night, boatswain, so I care not how many are on board the Siren."

"Why, captain, I thought—"

"A sailor has no right to think, sir, remember that: but I will tell you that my motive for cutting out Judge Randolph's schooner was because I knew no other I could get that would do as well, and it was my intention, I having been successful at cards, to leave for him even more than the value of his vessel, so that he could not accuse me of being a pirate, should he discover who took the craft."

"But I have found a vessel that is far better, fully armed, and just what I want, and the judge can keep his schooner to go privateering in himself, as I believe he intends to send her out on a cruise."

"Another vessel, captain?" asked several.

"Yes; there is an encampment of Gipsies below here: they are known as Gipsies of the Sea, and sail from land to land in their little fleet."

"I disguised myself as an oysterman yesterday and paid them a visit."

"They have thirteen vessels, and the trimmest, most rakish lot I ever saw."

"One of them, evidently the flag-ship of the fleet, is much larger than the others, and there is not water enough for her to anchor close in the bay and she is the furthest out."

"I left just before dark, and I noticed that no guard was on any vessel, and though I waited a long time, no one came on board from the encampment, so I do not think there is any one in charge."

"We will muffle oars, run in quietly, slip the cable, and tow her out into the St. Michael's; then, when we get the woods between us and the camp, we will set sail."

"If we have to fight for her, lads, I will have that craft."

The men seemed to be willing to be led by their commander wholly, and going to the shore they got into a boat in waiting.

Silently they pulled down the river for a short distance, when other boats came out, from under the shadow of the trees growing along the banks, and joined them.

To the others, in the boats, the leader made known his plans, the oars were muffled, and they set off down the river.

The moon was shining brightly, but the boats went silently along, close to the starboard shore, and unless a curious eye happened to glance out upon the river, from some plantation or cabin, no one would know of their presence.

Arriving in sight of the tapering masts of the Gipsy fleet, the captain called the boats around him, told of his plan of action, ordered arms to be ready for use, and once more moved forward.

Soon the fleet was but a few cable-lengths away.

Then, not twenty boat-lengths away, and still no hail came.

The largest schooner was furthest out, and she was the prize the captain had in view.

As she lay upon the water, beautiful in every outline, the men could hardly refrain from exclamations of admiration.

Nearer and nearer drew the boat, until the captain ran alongside, and yet no challenge from the schooner.

"Slip the cable, boatswain," was the whispered order.

Quickly it was obeyed.

"Make fast, men, and we'll tow her out."

This order was also obeyed with promptness, and a moment after, with three boats towing ahead, and one on either side, the beautiful schooner began to move away from her sister craft.

Further and further, and yet no cry of alarm from the Gipsy encampment.

Out of the bay, and then with her sharp bow turned down the river, she went.

At length the forest cut off from the view of those in the boats the glimmering camp fires, and then the captain said in a triumphant voice:

"Lads, the schooner is ours!"

The men choked back the cheer that arose to their lips, sprung on board the beautiful vessel, and instantly the white sails began to fall, the wind caught them, and the swift craft glided through the waters at a pace that showed she was no laggard, and that her rakish rig did not belie her.

Rounding the point of land, upon which was the Gipsy encampment, the schooner began to ride gracefully the waves of the Chesapeake, and headed for open water under a press of canvas.

The boats not needed were then scuttled and left to sink to the bottom, the crew were assigned to their duties, and the captain, for the first time getting opportunity, descended to the cabin, just as the sun rose over the waters.

He stepped gayly down the companionway, entered the cabin, and started back with an exclamation of surprise, at the same time drawing a pistol from his belt, as he discovered that he was not alone, and that there were occupants there.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ALLIES.

THAT the captain of the daring crew who had boarded the schooner, was a surprise to the occupants of the cabin was evident, for they looked upon him in amazement, as did he at them.

There were two of them, and they were in irons.

One was Chandos, the Gipsy King, and he was seated in a chair, and chained to the floor.

The other was Nunah, the Gipsy, half-reclining upon a sofa, and also chained to the floor.

The one upon whom they turned their gaze was a man of perhaps twenty-eight.

His face was both reckless and sad, handsome and resolute, and upon him rested the air of a man of refinement.

Perhaps he was dissipated, for there was that in his countenance to show that he was a man governed by his passions.

He was well formed, and undoubtedly a man of strength and nerve above the average.

His dress was that of a sailor, jacket of blue broadcloth, white duck pants and a soft hat, turned up on one side with an anchor pin.

A scarf was about his waist, and in it were sever several pistols, and one he held in his hand.

Seeing the condition of those in the cabin, he returned the weapon to his scarf, and said in a frank, free-and-easy way:

"Well, lad, you are on the breakers it seems."

Chandos the Gipsy King returned in his deep tones, and in English, though with a foreign accent:

"I was: but if this craft is not in the hands of the Gipsies of the Sea, I am not."

"Ah! they are your foes?"

"No, they are my people."

"You are a Gipsy then?"

"I am Chandos the Gipsy King," was the proud reply.

"Indeed! my schooner is honored by the presence of royalty."

"Your schooner?"

"Yes, for I captured her at her moorings just before dawn, and, being in hard luck ashore, I intend to try my fortune at sea," was the frank response.

"Under what flag?"

"Bless you, I hadn't thought. I am a natural born sailor, but Fate turned against me, the

woman I loved took death as a bridegroom, and I became reckless, gambled, quarreled, fought and killed my superior officer, and they cut my anchors and set me adrift out of the navy, and I went ashore, high and dry."

"Now I am afloat again, and luck may change; thus you have my history, and my name has been on the black list too often to protect it now, so I'll give it to you—Adrian Arundel at your service. Now who are you?"

"I told you, Chandos the Gipsy King."

"I must say that you look every inch a king, but are at present in difficulty it seems."

"Yes, I disobeyed the Gipsy laws, and am to be punished with death," was the cool reply.

"Not a bit of it; they may have intended to make an example of you, to prevent other kings from doing as you did, whatever that was; but they'll not do it now, as you are in my charge, and I need just such a fine fellow as you are, as I have not a single lieutenant."

"Who, pray, is that lovely lady? Your queen, doubtless?"

"No, one of my tribe only."

"Well, she is pretty enough for a queen, and if she wishes to stay with you we'll make a midy of her, for I have heard all you Gipsies are sailors, even to the children."

"Would that we had never beheld the sea; but never mind, I am not one to murmur against fate."

"That's right, for it will do no good; now I'll look a man up that will knock those irons off of you and your sweet companion, and I am in earnest, if you will accept my offer."

The Gipsy King turned to Nunah and spoke to her for a few minutes in their native tongue, and what she said in reply seemed to decide his course, for he said to Captain Arundel, who was watching them with interest.

"You are a bold man and we will serve you; but my fleet will soon be in chase, if they are not now."

"No, we got the schooner out without ruffling a feather or rousing a dog, and not a sail is in sight; but don't call it *your fleet*, for you are no longer Chandos, the Gipsy King, but Lieutenant Chandos King of the schooner—what is its name?"

"Merciless."

"Ah! well we will be merciful and change its name to—well, *The Gipsy*."

Both Chandos and Nunah seemed pleased with the name, and it was evident that the free-and-easy manner and looks of the young captain had won their hearts, and they looked upon him as a friend.

Their situation had been desperate they well knew; but they were true Gipsies and would have met their doom unflinchingly.

But, strange believers in destiny, superstitious, as all ignorant persons are, they felt that they were now in the hands of Fate, that it was not intended they should die for the sins they had been guilty of, and they decided to throw themselves into the stream of circumstances and float with the tide.

Making known this determination Chandos saw that it pleased the young captain, who at once went on deck to give orders for some one to come down and knock the irons off of the hands and feet of the Gipsies.

This was soon done, and, Stoicks as they were, trained to show no emotion, they both warmly grasped the hand of the young captain.

"Well, I am as glad as you are, so let us drop the matter, and I'll assign you to duty, and among the traps we brought on board, I can find a suit for Midshipman Nunah here, for in the life we will lead, breeches will be found more desirable than petticoats, and—Good God!"

His sudden cry fairly startled the two Gipsies, and they gazed upon him in amazement, as he stood with his eyes riveted upon a small portrait that hung in the cabin.

"Whose portrait is that?" he asked hoarsely.

"Mine, it was."

"True, but whose likeness, Gipsy?" he continued impatiently.

"It is a likeness of the Queen of the Gipsies."

"Great God! what a resemblance."

"It drove the blood in torrents from my heart," he muttered, and with another longing look at the portrait he turned and left the cabin, evidently deeply moved by the likeness of the Gipsy Queen to some one he knew.

CHAPTER XXX.

A STRANGE COMBAT.

WHEN dawn broke over the Gipsy encampment, and the schooner was discovered gone, a wail of woe went up from the men that, heard by Queena in her tent, quickly brought her out to seek out the cause.

At first she could not believe it; but soon it became too true to doubt, as in spite of their counting over and over again they could not make thirteen vessels, and the gem of the fleet was missing.

Instantly she suspected treachery in the tribe, and ordered all to assemble before her, that she might find from the missing ones who were the traitors.

But, men, women and children all were present excepting two; those two were the king and Nunah.

And they had been taken on board the schooner and left there.

For them to escape from their irons Queena knew to be impossible, for the Death Judges had brought her the key, after locking them upon the prisoners and leaving them in the cabin.

And, had they the free use of their limbs, it would be impossible, all knew, for King Chandos and Nunah to get sail on the schooner and run off with her.

Queena was a woman who acted promptly, and at once she dispatched a smaller vessel up to the St. Michael's, in search of the lost craft, and ordered five of the largest of the fleet to prepare for sea, determined to chase down the fugitive, wherever it could be found.

Upon the fleetest and largest of the fleet, now that the Merciless was gone, she went herself, and then issued her orders for the government of the encampment during her absence.

"Had there been guards on the vessels, the schooner would not have been cut out as it was," she said, and at once commanded that each craft should have a guard sleep on board from that on, for it was a custom of the Gipsies to have no sentinels.

The vessel sent up the St. Michael's returned in a few hours, reporting a fruitless search, and then the little fleet of five, selected for the pursuit, set sail and stood out of the harbor.

These five were the fastest flyers of the flotilla, and like the very wind they went down the bay, for Queena felt convinced that the Merciless, if in the hands of King Chandos, would lay her course across the ocean, as soon as Cape Charles was rounded.

How far the plot of the king had really gone she could not tell, though she believed she had discovered all; yet this cutting out of the schooner so promptly after his being put in irons, seemed to prove that he had been fully prepared for the emergency.

In her own heart she had not intended that King Chandos should die, though, by the law of his tribe she had the power to take his life, and Nunah's; but she did intend to drive them from the encampment, and let them seek other bands of the Roving Race with which to dwell.

As he had fled, an unpardonable sin, carrying with him the woman for whom he had sinned, and the choice vessel of the fleet, it roused the devil in the nature of Queena, and she was determined now that his punishment should be such as the tribe might mete out.

Under different circumstances Queena would have gone through life, loved by all, and a noble character; but a bitter fate had dragged her from the pinnacle she had occupied, and the slumbering demon in her nature had awakened to strike at all who had wronged her.

When Point Lookout had been passed, the five vessels, like a flock of pigeons, holding closely together, the look-out at the mast-head reported a sail in sight, over under the eastern shore.

Instantly the course was changed for the stranger, and then another was discovered and still another.

Watching them attentively, the Gipsy Queen soon made out that there were two large schooners in chase of a brigantine, and that they so had the wind of the chase that they must bring her to action, or cause her surrender without attempting to face her foes with her guns.

Recognizing that the Merciless was not one of the vessels, Queena had given the order to hold on their former course, when she noticed that the flag of the brigantine was an American, and that at the peak of the schooners was British.

Instantly she made up her mind to aid the craft of her country, and as she did so, saw the color changed to half-mast and union down, while a gun, as a signal of distress was fired from her starboard bow.

She also observed that the brigantine, though a trim sailor, could never escape her pursuers, and must surrender or run ashore, for to fight them both would be madness.

Quickly she decided what to do, and called to one of the Gipsies near, who acted as an officer:

"Vestal, signal the Greyhound, Spray and Surf to attack the smallest of yonder schooners, and the Zitelle to follow the Huntress in assailing the other."

"Do you intend to join in the *melee*, queen,

between England and America?" asked the Gipsy officer with surprise.

"I intend to do as I please, Vestal: obey me!"

He knew the temper of his imperious queen and obeyed.

It was evident that the strange order signaled to them, surprised the captains of the other Gipsy schooners; but they followed their directions, and soon the little fleet was divided, the Grayhound, Spray and Surf heading for one of the British schooners, the Zitelle and Huntress laying their course so as to intercept the other.

What they were both the Englishmen and American seemed at a loss to know, for their colors were such as they had never seen at the peak of a vessel before.

But the British commanders were determined to bring matters to a crisis with the brigantine, and then be ready to meet the pack they feared were coming on to worry them.

With this intention they at once opened a hot fire upon the brigantine, which at once returned it, and, putting about, boldly faced her foes, confident of aid, as it was her signal of distress that had caused the Sea Gipsies to change their course.

With the first broadside of the British schooners, the Gipsy Queen called her crew to quarters, and the signal was made to the others of the fleet to do likewise.

"Now, Vestal, set your iron dogs to barking," said the queen, her face flushed with the excitement of the scene.

"At which vessel, queen?" he asked.

"*The British*," she said, almost fiercely.

The Gipsy officer shook his head, but gave the order, and the Huntress reeled under the discharge of her guns.

Once the first shot had been fired, and the Gipsies entered into action with that recklessness of consequences that characterizes their natures.

They had been only too anxious for any scene of excitement; but roaming unmolested through many lands, they had looked upon no country as more their own than another, though their sympathies were more with Spain, many of them having been born there.

Once the ice of neutrality had been broken by them, and they entered into action with a spirit that made up in courage and enthusiasm what they lacked in heavy metal, and the British schooners that had at first little dreaded the tiny fleet were compelled to turn their attention to them as a pack that might have it in them to worry them to death in an action which they had deemed was a victory for themselves.

With a skill that was wonderful, the Gipsy Queen handled her vessel and the others, watching the action with an eagle eye, and instantly signaling if she deemed any of her little fleet were going wrong.

Twice had an iron hail torn over her decks, and several of her crew had gone down before it never to rise; but her face had not flinched, nor her nerves quivered, and nearer and nearer she drew to the danger she had voluntarily faced.

The brigantine, now seen to be as light in a moment as were the Gipsy vessels, was standing the brunt of the battle bravely; but that she could not last long was evident, and the Gipsy Queen decided to bring the matter to a close as soon as possible, and instantly signaled to her fleet to board the Englishmen.

The British commanders at once recognized that their foes intended to carry them by boarding, and knowing that their safety was in keeping them off with their guns, as they observed the Gipsies' decks crowded with men, fought hard to keep them at a distance by crippling them.

But the fire rained upon each vessel from three different quarters confused their gunners, who aimed badly, and several shots from the Huntress crippling the larger of the two Englishmen, it was evident that they were at the mercy of their assailants.

To fly was impossible, for they would have to run a severe gauntlet, and then have upon their heels a flock of rapid sailors, so they had but one course to pursue.

That course was to strike their flag, and after a signal had passed between the two king's craft, down from their peaks fluttered the British ensign in token of surrender.

A wild cheer burst from the lips of the Gipsy crews, and was answered by the Americans with a will, while the signal was given by

Queen for her little fleet to lay to, repair damages, and then hold on their course once more.

But instantly the American brigantine signaled to the Huntress, which had been noticed as the flag-ship of the little fleet, that her commander desired an interview, and the Gipsy Queen ordered her schooner put away to grant the request.

The British vessels, having lowered their flag, lay motionless upon the waters, their crews looking after their dead and wounded, while the American had also come to, and the Gipsies were heading toward a common center, evidently feeling they no longer held an interest in the affair, and only awaited the pleasure of their queen.

When the Huntress was within a few cable-lengths of the brigantine she luffed up into the wind and lay to, and instantly a boat put off from the side of the American.

In it, as it drew near the Gipsy schooner, the queen saw several officers of high rank, and her crew were ordered to receive them with honor.

At the gangway Vestal, the Gipsy lieutenant, met them, and a young officer, in the uniform of a naval captain, said politely:

"I have given myself the honor of coming on board your vessel, sir, to thank you for your kindly service, which has been great indeed, as these gentlemen are Admiral Graham and General Custis of the American Navy and Army, who have escaped capture by your timely succor."

Vestal, who was a handsome, intelligent young Gipsy, bowed politely at the words of the American, and answered:

"It is our queen, sir, that you have to thank; I will lead you to her."

"Your queen! this then is the Gipsy fleet I have heard of as hovering about the bay of late?"

"Yes, sir, a part of it."

The officers exchanged glances with each other, and Admiral Graham remarked:

"That accounts for your sable flag, which smacks of piracy, young sir; but lead us to your queen, pray, that we may thank her, and ask her to accompany Captain Lennox here on his visit to the two British schooners, which she caused to lower their colors."

Vestal led the way to the cabin, the officers remarking the while upon the discipline, order and beauty of the vessel, ere they were ushered into the presence of the Gipsy Queen.

She was dressed in her picturesque suit of crimson velvet, and looked grandly, weirdly beautiful as she arose to receive them with an easy grace and dignity that surprised them.

Enraptured by her imperious beauty, they seemed momentarily nonplussed, and the handsome young captain seemed to be suddenly seized with speechlessness; but the old admiral came to his rescue, and said in courtly tones:

"Fair queen, we came on board your vessel to thank its commander, whatever flag he might sail under, for his prompt acknowledgment of our signal of distress, and his manly fight in our behalf."

"We find that commander a beautiful woman, and our hearts as well as our lips bow in homage and thanks."

"I am glad to have served you, gentlemen; though Gipsies, we are friendly to America, and I shall ever be."

"Be seated, please," was the calm reply of the queen, and more and more impressed with her they obeyed, the admiral presenting his companions, and adding:

"Had the British schooners taken our brigantine, Lady Queen, they would have gotten a most valuable prize, for the general here and myself were on a tour of inspection, our staffs accompanying us, and besides, the navy and army paymasters have considerable funds on board."

"You see then, what a valuable service you have rendered, and you will not find our Government unappreciative."

"I seek no rewards, sir; I did but my duty, and beg to turn over to Captain Lennox the two vessels as his prizes."

"No, lady, I could not think of receiving them at your hands, for you were the victor not I," and the young captain gazed with admiration he could not restrain upon the beautiful woman.

"Then, sir, you may as well signal the English commanders to run their flags up to the peak again and stand out to sea, for I will not accept their surrender."

They saw by her face she was in earnest, and finding that she would in no way share, or allow her crew to share in the prize-money, they soon after took their departure, greatly impressed by the strange and beautiful woman they had met, and they watched her tiny fleet with the deepest interest, as it sped on down the bay.

"Lennox, by my faith, but I believe you are in love," said General Custis as he joined the admiral and that officer, after the English schooners had been manned by crews from the brigantine, and headed for Baltimore, while the American cruiser held on her way for Fortress Monroe.

"I believe you are right, general, for I have had to attend to all the negotiations, as he was calling the English officers *Captain Queen*, answering 'no, lady' and 'yes, lady,' and in fact steering wildly: yes, Lennox, with the general I say you are in love."

The young officer flushed crimson, and said with considerable earnestness:

"I believe I am; if not, I certainly could love that woman."

"A remarkable being she is, and as beautiful as a goddess; but, captain, beware, for where there's a queen there must be a king."

"It don't follow, admiral; at any rate I shall know, for I will meet that woman again."

"You've been hit hard, Lennox; but don't strike your colors until you know what your enemy is," and the admiral turned away; but it was evident that the Gipsy Queen had left her impress upon the hearts and brains of the elderly officers as well as the younger one.

But Mortimer Lennox was not a man to go wild at every pretty face, yet having found one that he could not forget, he was determined to know more of a woman that so deeply impressed him at one meeting.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A METAMORPHOSIS.

AFTER leaving the brigantine and her two prizes, the Gipsy fleet held on down the Chesapeake with all speed, and gained the Atlantic ocean without further adventure.

A Norfolk fishing boat was brought to off Cape Henry, and reported having seen a schooner, which from her description Queena knew could be none other than the Merciless, stand directly out to sea.

With the start the Merciless had of fully eighteen hours, counting the delay of the combat in the Chesapeake, the Gipsy Queen knew that it would be impossible to overhaul her, and reluctantly gave the order to put back for the encampment.

"He has gone back to Spain doubtless; well, so be it, I will bide my time, and now devote myself to the one aim of my life, revenge on Vincent Vance," she murmured, and then, as if having decided to act at once she ordered the other vessels to continue on to the little harbor in the St. Michael's, while she stood away in the Huntress for Norfolk.

What her suddenly formed plot was the reader has already discovered, though he may not have recognized in the pretended Horace Gray, the Gipsy Queen; but Queena it was, for her brother had indeed been lost, and she took this means of commencing her tactics of revenge upon the master of Graylands.

Her adventure on a fishing smack that was carrying her to Annapolis, to prosecute her plot, her going home with Vincent Vance, and escape from death at the hands of himself and the lawyer, through knowing the secrets of the old mansion, her childhood's home, and the scene in the rookery of Henry Ross, the reader will remember.

But upon leaving Baltimore she had at once sought the retreat of the Gipsies, and after a short stay there, she had set sail in her schooner for the other shore, where the reader will recall the bold capture, or rather kidnapping of the beautiful child of Vincent Vance, who, by a strange fatality seemed to bear the same name as the Gipsy Queen's little daughter.

Back to her rendezvous she sailed with the fairy-like Zitelle, happy in the thought that she had struck a hard blow at Vincent Vance, in letting him know that his secret of the Ross and Rupert murders was not, as he had hoped, unknown, and that she had in her power the darling of his heart.

Had Queena, in her bitterness, intended harm to the little child, one glance into her beautiful, innocent eyes would have held her in check, for the little fairy seemed at once

drawn toward the strange woman, and after the first shock of surprise at her surroundings, and the dark-faced people she found herself with, had been seemingly contented.

But had her child eyes been able to read the past of the beautiful woman who bent over her so kindly; had the heart, and its hatred for her father and mother been laid bare before her, she would have shrunk away with terror and fear.

But fortunately for the peace of mind of mortals, the hearts and thoughts of those we come in contact with, are hidden from us, and thus we are content.

Arriving at the encampment the Gipsy Queen surprised her people, and delighted her own little Zitelle, by bringing with her a perfect fairy child, who, with her golden hair, dark blue eyes and marble-like complexion, was in striking contrast to the raven-haired, black-eyed, bronze-faced little Gipsy beauty.

But the two children at once proved the truism that we love our opposites, and almost immediately became friends.

Having brought the loose threads of my narrative together, I will now trace, in the following chapter, the fortunes of Vincent Vance, after he had departed from Graylands, bound on a daring enterprise, which he had been tempted into by possessing the letter from the ship-builder and the bank receipts he held of the late lawyer in the name of Rupert Judge.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE PRIVATEER.

HAVING been reared in the navy, which he resigned from upon the inheritance of a small fortune, Vincent Vance felt himself capable of commanding a vessel of war, and the kidnapping of his idol, little Zitelle, at once prompted him to do so.

The letter of the New York ship-builder to Judge Rupert showed him that a most desirable vessel could be obtained, and the receipts which he held of the bank in favor of deposits made by Rupert Judge he would boldly attempt to turn into gold.

In his remembrance, the judge had not been on to New York since the time the receipts were dated, and it was not likely that he was personally known at the bank, so that was in his favor.

"No, the sly fellow, not wishing any one to know what fortune he did have, marked to 'charity' the greater part of his earnings, and then sent the money to this New York bank under an assumed name.

"That is the way of it, and I will boldly risk the cashing of these receipts I hold, and then ho for salt water, and to wrest from that devil my beautiful child, or, if I cannot recover her, visit upon him a revenge that the Inquisition could not surpass for torture."

Such were the thoughts turning over and over again in the brain of Vincent Vance, as he was whirled rapidly on to New York in the stage, which in those days was the only means of public conveyance, as few packet-ships cared to risk the voyage between ports, with the coast haunted by British cruisers.

Without delaying anywhere longer than for meals and a change of horses, Vincent Vance hurried on his way, his brain in a fever about Zitelle's fate, his heart in an agony of grief at her loss, and with no thought for the wife he had left prostrated with sorrow for her child at Graylands.

And yet for himself the man had anxious thought, for with Horace Gray, as he believed the Gipsy Queen to be, in possession of his deadliest secrets, he knew he had the power at any time to turn upon him and ruin him.

"Once he is dead, and I have my darling restored to me, I will be a happy man, in spite of haunting memories," he muttered, when the bright sunlight was streaming upon him.

But with the darkness those phantoms of the past would not lie buried, and then it was that he suffered the agony of a crime-haunted conscience.

Again, with the glare of day, he would feel that one more blow must be struck, and that one at his wife, whom he now both feared and hated.

With Violet dead her fortune would go to Zitelle, and he would be the guardian to handle it, and only his daughter to render an account of his stewardship to.

At last the stage rolled up to the Jersey tavern, where the passengers were to leave it to be ferried across to New York, and in a short while after Vincent Vance was safely

ensconced in a fashionable tavern on Fulton street, then the aristocratic portion of the city.

It was after banking hours when he arrived so he concluded to go over and see the ship-builder who had written to Judge Rupert, and get a look at the schooner he had for sale.

He found the builder in his yard, was shown the schooner, lying at anchor off shore, and his sailor's eye brightened with admiration at the beauty of her outlines and rig.

Finding just what he could purchase the vessel for, he told the builder he would call the next day, and returned to his hotel.

But not to rest, for his mind was in too great a whirl with grief and excitement for sleep to come to him.

The next morning he put on his best looks and boldly walked to the bank.

The cashier was at his desk, and walking up to him Vincent Vance bowed with the courtly grace he was master of at will, and said politely:

"I believe you have deposits here, sir, made by Rupert Judge of Baltimore?"

The cashier bowed, when he saw the appearance of his visitor, glanced at his books and said:

"Yes, sir, there are such deposits, sent us by drafts from Baltimore; are you Mr. Judge?"

"Yes sir," was the bold reply.

"Do you wish to draw the deposits, Mr. Judge?"

"I am making some large purchases here, sir, and will draw on you as I need the money."

"They are payable, sir, only on presentation of the bank receipts, and your indorsement."

"I have the receipts here," and he took them from his pocketbook, wrote the name, Rupert Judge, boldly across one of them in the handwriting of the dead lawyer, which he could write at will, and handed it to the cashier, who promptly paid him the money on it.

With a happy heart at his fortune, he left the bank, went over to the ship-builder, bought the schooner, left word at the dock for a shipper to secure him a crew, and started to Washington city, where, upon his arrival, his name and former service in the navy gained for him the papers of an American Privateer.

Armed with this he returned to New York, and one week after set sail for Graylands, his plantation home, to learn if aught had been heard from Zitelle, and to then start upon his search for the kidnapper of his child.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE FATAL MEDALLION.

ONE dark, stormy night, some weeks after the sailing of the Bloodhound, as Vincent Vance had named his schooner, a stanch little craft was standing into the little bay near Graylands.

All was reefed close on board, and it was evident that the gale on the bay had been a severe one; but the schooner had weathered it finely, and at last ran for a haven into the Graylands basin.

Dropping anchor, in spite of the storm, a form enveloped in a long cloak was rowed ashore in a boat, and landed at the very point where little Zitelle had stood when seized by the kidnappers.

"Await me here, lads," was the low command, and the cloak-enveloped personage started toward the mansion, which looked grim and gloomy, as only one light was visible in it.

A moment the individual stood on the piazza, and then, hearing no sound within, and as though fully acquainted with the mansion, leant over and touched the panel of the door.

Instantly it opened, and quickly the cloaked form disappeared within, the secret panel being immediately closed.

Once within the large hall and the form stood silently listening; but only the sound without, of the fierce storm, was heard; no one was seeming about the house, and the bold invader crossed to the library door and cautiously opened it.

A dim light burned within, and what it revealed caused the intruder to pause and gaze earnestly before him at an object that seemed to rivet his attention.

The heavy cloak slipped from the shoulders, and the slender form of a youth was revealed — no not a youth, but of the Queen of the Gipsies in her disguise of her dead brother, Horace Gray.

Cautionily she approached the object that had so riveted her gaze and looked in silence upon the face of the dead.

Yes, the dead, for lying before her was the

cold form of Violet Vance, the upturned face strangely white, yet showing no sign of suffering, the small hands clasped across the heart that had ceased to pulsate with every breath.

She was dressed in deep black, and only her wedding ring had been left upon her finger, but upon her breast, hung by its massive chain, was the medallion with her husband's miniature, which kindly hands had placed there.

"Violet Vance," and as the woman spoke, addressing the dead ears that could not hear, her voice was hoarse with passion.

"Violet Vance, in the long ago, when your father had riches and mine had met with misfortune, you treated me cruelly, and with scorn; but when the tide turned, you fawned upon me and for what?

"To win my regard once more, that you might reap a reward.

"I have not forgotten one night, when I lay ill, how you slipped into my room at night, when my old nurse was asleep, and dropped poison into my cup.

"I never breathed it to mortal, Violet Vance, but I let you understand that I held you in my power, though I was a mere child then.

"Well, you have reveled here in my home, you have married the man who, like you, attempted to take my life, and he thinks he succeeded.

"And you, Violet, lie dead before me while I live; ay, dead by my hand, for this beautiful trinket resting over your pulseless heart, was made by my order, and the wearer of it dies of the deadly poison it is steeped in.

"It has done its work well, and now I claim it once more.

"I thought not so soon to find you dead; but it is as well, for it is another blow at the heart of him I shall do as long as life is left.

"I come here to-night to leave him just one line, that he may not have rest night or day."

She hastily drew from her pocket an ink-horn, quill and paper, and wrote as follows:

"VINCENT VANCE:

"This dead form will show you that I am yet on your trail.

"The poisoned medallion has done its deadly work and I claim it, but leave the miniature, as your hated face is already engraven on my heart and brain.

"Your wife is dead, your child is in my power, but you yet live, and therein is my joy.

"HORACE GRAY."

She pinned the paper upon the dress of the dead woman, and taking the miniature from the medallion laid it upon the white neck, while she thrust the gem-studded trinket into her own bosom.

Just then a loud knock resounded without on the door, and bounding across the room she seized her cloak, sprung to the wall, touched a spring, which opened a secret panel, and sprung out of sight into the narrow, dark space revealed, just as a servant was heard going through the hall to open the door, upon which a second loud knock had fallen with an impatient hand.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE RETURN TO GRAYLANDS.

The servant that went to the door, in answer to the knock that had alarmed the Gipsy Queen, and caused her to take refuge in the secret alcove in the wall, was startled at seeing a muffled form step in without a word.

He closed the door quickly against the fierce storm, and in vain tried to speak, as he saw the visitor going with rapid stride toward the library.

That visitor he recognized as his master, and utterance seemed to utterly fail him, so that he might tell him what was in that room.

But on the master of Graylands went, opened the door and stepped within.

He closed the door behind him, and then the servant heard one long cry of horror.

It came from the lips of Vincent Vance, for, not until he was alone in the library had his eyes fallen upon the dead form of his wife.

The Gipsy Queen heard the cry and partially opened the panel to look out, and discovered by the dress of the planter that he had not been at home, and had just discovered the dead form of his wife.

He was attired in a naval uniform, had around him a heavy cloak, and stood like one frozen with horror.

He had not loved his wife, yet he had not expected to find her dead, and the shock had wholly unnerved him, and he stood trembling and silent.

At last he gained courage and approached

the corpse and stood gazing upon it in abject fear.

Then his eyes caught sight of the note left by the Gipsy Queen, and the miniature which had been taken from the medallion.

Instantly seizing both he gazed first on one and then on the other, and then read the note.

Thrice he read it over, his hands that held the paper trembling violently, and his face as white as that of the dead wife at his side.

Then he sunk down with a groan by the table, and buried his face in his hands, the very picture of woe.

For some time he sat thus in silence, and then rising walked out into the hall, where several of the servants were awaiting, as though alarmed at his long stay in the room of death.

They bowed to him in sad silence, and he said sternly:

"James, why did you not tell me what to expect when I came in?"

"Massa, fore God I is 'shamed o' myself fer not doin' so, but you comed in so kind o' sudint, and I was lookin' for you to be drest up in uniform; then I couldn't speak, sir, for my heart were so full."

"When did my wife die?"

"This morning, master," said the housekeeper.

"She just faded away, the doctor not knowing what was the matter with her, saving it was grief for poor Miss Zitelle."

"She just faded away, sir, like a flower, and then we dressed her for the grave, for none of the families from the plantations seem to be home just now."

"And my child?"

"Nothing has been seen or heard of her, sir, and we is awful sorry for poor little Missy Zitelle."

Vincent Vance bit his lip to keep down his emotion, and then said:

"Well, I will go to my room and sleep, if I can, and in the morning I will bury poor Violet."

"Your room is all ready, sir."

"No, no, I will not go to the one next my wife's," he said, hurriedly.

"Then the blue room is ready."

"Where Judge Rupert slept—no, no," he said, with a shudder.

"Then I'll fix the south room, sir."

"All right, Phillis; call me when it is ready," and he turned back into the library.

As he did so, and the servants left the hall, one of the huge panels in the wall of the hall slowly turned, and out glanced the Gipsy Queen.

Seeing that no one was in the hall, she sprung quickly out, glided to the front door and out into the storm, muttering:

"Wherever you sleep, Vincent Vance, you will not get rid of me."

"No, no, I live with but one aim now, and thank Heaven I learned all the secret passages of this old mansion when I was a child."

"Go to your room, Vincent Vance, and to sleep, too, but you will not rest; no, you shall not rest until the grave covers you."

Rapidly across the lawn she went, and held her way down toward the shore.

CHAPTER XXXV.

HAUNTED.

MIDNIGHT at last rolled around, and still the storm beat with unabated fury, keeping the servants of the Graylands household huddling together around the kitchen hearth, for none of them would go to bed.

The winds howled dismally about the corners of the large, grand old mansion, and at every ruder gust there would a silence fall upon the sable gossipers about the fireside.

They were telling of the olden time, when two-thirds of the present mansion had been the home of a French exile, as they had heard, and 'twas said he had built the house after his own ideas.

"They does say thar are plenty o' secret rooms and hallways in the house," said the coachman.

"I know there is a great deal of space taken up by three-feet thick walls," added the housekeeper.

"Some folks say as ghosts were seen here in the olden time."

"If spirits was here once, they is now," remarked another.

And thus it went on, the talkers each moment adding to their fright, while alone in the library lay the dead, and alone in the south

room Vincent Vance tossed sleeplessly about, the taper on the hearth burning dimly and conjuring up shadows and phantoms before his excited vision.

At length tired nature asserted itself and he dropped off into an uneasy sleep.

How long he slept he knew not; but he was awakened by some sound in the room.

Perhaps it was from feeling the presence of another person.

Suddenly his eyes fell upon a white form in the other part of the large room, just opposite his bed.

It seemed to come out of the very wall, and was gazing directly upon him.

Was he dreaming?

No, he could not be, for he had his full senses. He pinched himself and felt the pain.

Then he coughed and heard the sound.

Yes, he was assuredly awake.

Then this spectral form came nearer and stood in the full glare of the taper.

There was no mistaking it now; *it was a woman.*

Quietly did Vincent Vance raise himself in bed and stare, wild-eyed, at the specter.

And as he looked the form took full shape in his eyes.

First he saw the trailing white dress, just such a one as he had seen Queena Gray wear in Spain.

Yes, there was the white lace, and the snowy muslin clinging to the supple form.

It seemed the very dress that Vincent Vance had beheld upon Queena Gray when he saw her dead, as he supposed, in the Haunted Ruin in Spain.

He would gain courage enough to raise his eyes to see if the red stain over the heart was there.

Yes, it was there, and one hand, the right, was pointing to the red mark soiling the white dress.

Still more courage he would gain and raise his eyes to the face.

He did so with an effort.

Yes, it was the face of Queena Gray.

And then, as he beheld and recognized, the form advanced toward him, and from his lips broke a cry so loud and long that it went through every part of the house.

With that cry he fell back upon his bed unconscious.

And up the stairs, along the hall, came hurrying feet, and into the room dashed the frightened servants.

But with wild yells they started back, knocking each other down in their haste, as they beheld the weird form.

It advanced toward them, glided along the hallway, descended the stairs, and without unlocking the door went through it, so said the startled servants, out into the storm.

Had the ghost remained in the mansion every one of the negroes would have deserted it, and left their unconscious master and dead mistress to its tender mercies.

But as it went out into the storm, they remained in the house, and as soon as they could collect their scattered senses, set to work to restore their master to consciousness.

This was a hard task to do, but at last the man rallied, and upon seeing the sable faces bending over him, he said:

"It was a dream then."

"No, massa, it were no dream," answered James solemnly.

"You saw it too?" he cried eagerly.

"We seen it."

"And it was—"

"A speerit."

"Yes."

"And a woman, massa."

"Who?" he asked in a hoarse whisper.

"It were the image o' our Missy Queena as kilt herself."

"Oh God!"

The cry broke from the lips of Vincent Vance, as though wrung by mortal anguish from his inmost soul.

"It were older as a speerit, massa, than when I seen Missy Queena last, sir, afore she went ter France, and—"

"Silence!"

The stern command ended the story James was beginning to tell of his young mistress that had been, and rising, Vincent Vance hastily dressed himself, threw his cloak around him and said:

"I will return on board my schooner, James, but to-morrow will come on shore and bury my poor wife."

"The ghost went out doors, sir."

Vincent Vance shuddered, but walked out of the room, and thus left the house wholly in charge of the frightened servants.

The storm was still unabated in its fury, but he cared not for that, as there was a fiercer storm raging in his heart and brain.

But suddenly he started and came to a dead halt.

And no wonder, for bright, vivid flashes came from off the shore, and loud bursts of artillery.

And by their blaze he beheld a small schooner gliding out of the basin, having evidently come from the mouth of a small creek, and upon his vessel were her guns turned.

Half a dozen iron messengers were sent crashing into the privateer, riding safely at anchor close in near the landing, and then all was darkness, as the strange vessel stood on out to sea.

But in one glance he recognized the schooner.

It was the same that had carried off his child, his darling Zitelle.

What could her presence there mean? This mystery he could not solve by standing there, and the sight of the schooner aroused him to busy action, and swiftly he sped to the shore and hailed loudly for a boat to be sent for him.

The confusion on board was terrific, for every shot had struck home, and two men lay dead beneath decks, so it was a long time before he could make his voice heard.

But at last he was heard, and a boat came.

"What vessel was that, Lieutenant Rose?" he asked of a young officer whose services he had secured in New York.

"God knows, sir; I thought it was the Flying Dutchman, she came on us so suddenly," was the answer.

"She was lying in the creek across the basin yonder, and has put out to sea; get the anchor up and I will give chase, for Rose, that is the same craft that kidnapped my child."

At once the crew sprung to their posts, the dead, at the command of the captain, were tossed overboard, and half an hour after the Huntress, for the reader has recognized the vessel doubtless, passed out of the basin into the storm, the privateer was in chase, bounding over the storm-lashed waters.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE PURSUER PURSUED.

DIMLY in the distance, when the privateer gained an offing from the harbor of Graylands, the schooner that had poured such an unexpected fire into her, could be seen.

All the sail that she could carry was set on the privateer, and the way she bounded over the waters it was evident to Vincent Vance that he had not been cheated in his bargain.

Duty called him back to the side of his dead wife, to place her form in honor in the grave; but he turned his back on her to hold on in pursuit of his child, who he felt confident was on the schooner ahead.

The rough waves of the Chesapeake caused the Huntress to labor severely, and the larger vessel gained steadily upon her, until at last Vincent Vance said:

"Mr. Rose, I think we are near enough to open with our bow guns."

"We are, Captain Vance; but I believe you said that was the vessel whose crew kidnapped your child?" politely answered the lieutenant.

"I did, sir, and I shall show them no mercy."

"But the same fire might kill your little daughter, sir."

"My God, yes! I thank you, Rose, for the suggestion."

"No, I will not use my guns, but simply overhaul him and take him by boarding."

"It would be the better plan, sir, and in a short while it will be dawn and then we can see what we are doing, and just what caliber he has."

"Oh, he'll fight, if we have two guns to his one and treble him in the number of crew," and Vincent Vance waited longingly for day to break.

At length Lieutenant Rose said:

"He seems to be running for that point of land inshore, sir; are there inlets there for him to hide in?"

"Yes, a small navy could find refuge there; ha! what means that signal?"

The last remark of the privateer captain was caused by seeing a light flash on the deck of the Huntress.

"There it is again, sir."

"And again! What can it mean?"

That question none could answer, and presently there came a flash and report from a gun, and a moment after the same signal as before was repeated.

Dawn was now breaking, and in a short while the Huntress could be plainly seen in the morning light.

The gale had gone down, but a stiff breeze was blowing, and the waves of the Chesapeake yet ran high, and it was evident the privateer schooner could overhaul the Huntress within a couple of hours more, as the rough waters bothered the smaller craft far more than it did the larger one.

But, as those on the privateer were beginning to congratulate themselves that they soon would be able to punish the daring crew that had fired upon them at their anchorage, a cry burst from a score of throats, and all eyes turned landward.

The Huntress, upon leaving the basin, after running a couple of leagues out into open water, had squared away directly down the coast, and held on this course, though gradually nearing the land.

The point of land, to which Lieutenant Rose had referred, was not a league away, just off the starboard bow, and within a mile of the Gipsy schooner.

And the cry that had come from the crew of the privateer, was at suddenly discovering coming out from under shelter of the land, a number of rakish-looking schooners.

It was the fleet of the Gipsies of the Sea, and right into their midst the Huntress was heading.

Taken wholly by surprise at sight of such a flotilla, Vincent Vance did not immediately give the order to go about; but seeing the Huntress suddenly put about, and the fleet all change their course, as though to attack him, he quickly gave orders for flight.

On came the fleet, and away flew the privateer, having shaken out the reefs from her sails to aid her flight.

But the Gipsy fleet still kept their reefs, and seeming content with having saved their queen, and given the privateer a scare, they soon after squared away and gave up the chase.

But the sight of this fleet, all alike, except differing in size, and aiding the very vessel that had stolen his Zitelle, and upon which he knew the supposed Horace Gray to be, added another drop to the cup of misery which Vincent Vance held to his lips.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE CORSAIR QUEEN.

MONTHS have passed away since the night the Huntress fled from Graylands harbor, and escaped by joining the fleet of the Gipsies of the Sea.

Violet Vance, the ambitious, haughty mistress of Graylands, was buried by her faithful servants for mourners, for her husband was away in his schooner, and the grand old mansion was closed up and left in solitude, with only the butler and housekeeper to have an eye on it by day, for they would not remain there at night for a fortune, preferring to take up their abode with the other slaves in the plantation quarters.

Once or twice the privateer schooner of Vincent Vance had put into the harbor, but always in the daylight, and then only to remain a short time.

Then, on each visit, the old servants learned that their master had no tidings of his lost child, and yet that he had not given up the search.

They heard, too, that he had been successful as a privateersman, having sent several prizes into Baltimore, and on one occasion fought and taken an English cruiser.

But the faithful slaves thought that sea life and battles did not agree well with their master, as his face had become haggard and his eyes sunken, and his hair was rapidly turning gray.

On these visits, too, they heard that a pirate schooner had been playing sad havoc along the American coast.

Some said her commander was a disgraced naval officer who had turned pirate, and others, who professed to have seen him, represented him as a West Indian buccaneer, tall, dark-faced, and with long black hair and fierce eyes.

Another rumor running riot along the coast of the Chesapeake, and in fact from Long

Island Sound to Cape Fear, was to the effect that there was a buccaneer fleet afloat, and the admiral of it was a woman.

She had not marauded the homes of Americans, and was said to frequently aid the cruisers of the United States in their combats with English vessels of war; but the ships of other nationalities, 'twas said, fell a prey to her fleet.

Always keeping together, the vessels of this Corsair Queen as she was called, were too strong to be met by any one cruiser, and consequently she was seldom molested by the English, and never by the Americans, who knew her to be a secret friend of their cause.

But the Corsair Queen struck boldly at the British cruisers, and had sent several in as prizes, to present to the American Government, though merchant craft she kept for her own benefit.

Who this Corsair Queen really was the reader may well know, though many were the stories told regarding her, and her purpose in becoming a freebooter.

It was noticed that her little fleet seemed ever on the watch, as though searching for some one vessel; but that vessel eluded the Gipsies of the Sea week after week and month after month.

One pleasant afternoon, after the two servants had looked over the mansion of Graylands, and given it an airing, they discovered coming up the coast, yet well off from the land, a rakish-looking brigantine.

Hardly had their eyes fallen on this pretty vessel, gliding along under full sail, driven by a six-knot breeze, when up the coast, around a bold wooded headland a couple of leagues distant, swept a schooner under a full press of canvas.

At first they believed it was their master's vessel, but saw that they were mistaken, as the strange schooner did not carry the stars and stripes at its peak, but a blood-red flag instead.

"Phillis, dar gwine ter be trouble now, honey, fer yonder vessel am a inemy," said James.

"Which am de inemy, James?" asked the negro woman.

"Waal, you sees ther brigantine does carry ther stars and stripes?"

"Which am de brigantine, James?"

"Dar, de first one we see."

"Yes."

"Waal yer see t'other vessel don't?"

"Don't what, James?"

"Phillis, you is dumb, honey; don't carry ther stars and stripes."

"What do she carry, James?"

"You has me, honey; but it look English; no, they has hauled down the red flag and up goes a black one."

"Oh, Lordy, brack means pirates, James."

"We is brack, Phillis, and we hain't pirates."

"Dat am so; waal, what do it mean?"

"It means dey is buccaneers—see, what did I tolle you?"

A flash and report from the bows of the brigantine caused this remark, and a shot was sent over the schooner.

"Am dat pretty play vessel going to fight that large skunner, James?"

"It does look so; dat am de brigantine Rover; you know Massa Cap'n Mort'mer Lennox am her cap'n, and he am ther man ter fight her, Phillis, fer all them Lennoxes is fighters! Golly, see der skunner open too."

And as James spoke the schooner luffed and sent a broadside at the brigantine.

And a most disastrous one it was too, as it tore across the decks of the brigantine, leaving a number of dead and wounded forms to mark its merciless course.

The brigantine however rallied from the shock and again opened on the schooner, at the same time heading so as to close with her.

But this the schooner, although evidently heavier in guns and crew, and by fifty tons the largest, seemed to wish to avoid, as she held straight on her course.

The brigantine had reduced her sail to fighting trim, and yet the schooner had not taken in a stitch of canvas, which those on the American vessel could not account for.

As the brigantine drew nearer the schooner both vessels opened fiercely, the brigantine with a quartering fire from her bow and pivot guns, and the schooner with her broadside.

Both vessels fired well and gave hard knocks but it was evident that the brigantine was suffering the most from the larger guns of her foe.

But Captain Lennox was no man to back

out of a fight he had begun, and still held on, determined to come to close quarters if in his power.

This, however, the schooner's commander seemed determined to prevent, and luffing a little he sent a terrific broadside into the brigantine, which brought down her foremast and caused her to broach to.

Having thus crippled his adversary, and having him at his mercy, the schooner changed its course and headed straight for the wounded brigantine, as though to board.

As the schooner neared the brigantine, Captain Lennox kept his guns, the only two that could be brought to bear upon her, working with a will, and his fire was returned from his foe with such good marksmanship that the American became more and more of a wreck.

All this time the bluff in front of Graylands was crowded with the slaves, who had been summoned by the firing, and most interested watchers were they of the combat.

But suddenly a yell broke from them of mingled alarm and surprise.

This was caused by seeing half a score of vessels dart out of the mouth of the creek, that emptied into the little bay, and head straight out toward the combatants.

No one had suspected the presence of a vessel, let alone ten, within the shelter of the Graylands creek, and it was a surprise to the negroes almost as great as had been the ghost in the mansion.

But hardly had they recovered from this surprise, when they had another, as around the bold headland came three more vessels, just like those that had been hidden in the creek.

These three schooners, running under a press of sail, showed why the first vessel had been unwilling to stop and fight the brigantine.

That they were seen from the decks of the schooner and brigantine was evident, but that those in the bay had not been discovered was also certain, as the jutting arm of the harbor hid them from view.

A few moments more and the schooner would have boarded the brigantine; but suddenly, out into full view swept the little fleet, and the schooner's commander was taken aback.

That he was amazed and alarmed was evident, as the schooner yawed wildly, as though the helmsman had received several different orders in rapid succession.

And there was cause for alarm, as the brigantine had not surrendered, but was keeping up a hot fire upon the schooner; the three vessels had the windward of him and were coming down the coast, while the fleet running out of the bay put him between three fires and cut off his escape to open water.

At last, having apparently decided as to his course, the captain of the schooner put her about, and determined to run the dangerous gauntlet to open water.

"Folkses, dat am de fleet of de Corsair Queen we has heerd so much 'bout, an' now dar is goin' ter be trouble," said James with a serious air.

And his words were true.

CHAPTER XXXVIII. ON A CORSAIR'S DECK.

THE daring determination of the schooner's commander, who had been caught in such a dangerous position, was at once carried out, and he headed for open water, his men at their guns, and firing at any one of the vessels of the two fleets sailing to head him off, while he also spitefully sent a shot or two at the crippled brigantine, as it was the cause of his being in such a hazardous locality.

But the two fleets of the Corsair Queen, that is the three vessels which had rounded the headland in pursuit of the schooner, and the nine which had come out of the bay of Graylands, were spreading sail, and making every effort to head off the foe, though they were not firing upon the flying craft.

The brigantine, though crippled, and unable to join in the pursuit, kept up a fire from her bow guns, and suddenly the schooner's bowsprit was cut away, the jibs flapped wildly in the air, and under a full pressure of lower and topsails she would not mind her helm and the next moment lay broadside to, and at the mercy of the numerous foes crowding upon her.

And on those foes came at a slapping pace, yet silently, as no gun was fired, though the schooner kept hers booming, and a crew at work in a vain endeavor to rig and set a new bowsprit.

Nearer and nearer came the schooners, until the largest of the fleet, the Huntress, was laid alongside the schooner in splendid style, just as two boat-loads of seamen from the brigantine boarded on the port quarter.

Over the bulwarks sprung the Corsair Queen, her face flushed, a pistol in one hand and a small sword in the other, and at her back came her dark-faced Sea Gipsies.

The schooner's crew withstood the rush, for they fought with a courage that was grand.

But the Corsair Queen and her Gipsies of the Sea had boarded the schooner to take it, and her daring, dark-faced crew, who knew no other duty than to obey her slightest gesture and word, glance toward her for a sign of what to do.

Through all other combats the Corsair Queen had personally led her Gipsies in the thickest of the fight; but in this, the one fight she had longed for, she stood aloof, and pointed with her sword for the men to break the determined line that opposed them.

And in that line, in the very front, stood three persons, upon whom her flashing eyes were fixed.

Those three were, first, the same dashing, reckless young officer who had cut out the Gipsy schooner Merciless from her anchorage in the St. Michael's, and, having found Chandos, the disgraced Gipsy King, and Nunah, the pretended Queen of Fate, on board, had made them his lieutenants.

Adrian Arundel, the young captain, whose dissipations and wild acts had driven him from the association of honorable men, was certainly a gallant sailor, as well as a thorough one, and, in spite of the overwhelming numbers brought against him, and already upon his decks, was not a man to tamely submit.

In his own heart he knew the struggle was hopeless; but having that knowledge, he was determined to meet his fate bravely, and, having lost all hope, and seeing the noose of the hangman before his eyes, he longed to be shot down, to die fearlessly upon his own deck, even though under an outlaw flag, than submit and be run up to the yard-arm as a pirate.

He held the center of the deck, and at his back were the main body of his crew, all depending upon him as to their course.

Upon the starboard side, and in a line with him, his large cutlass already reddened with human blood was Chandos, the Gipsy, the second one upon whom the eyes of the Corsair Queen were turned; in fact Queena had hardly seen the central figure of Adrian Arundel, other than to note that he was not a man to submit without a desperate struggle, for her eyes were more particularly upon the one who had ruled the Gipsies, and she who occupied the port side of the deck, the third one who had riveted the gaze of the attacking crew.

That one was Nunah, undaunted in the face of danger, pale, but resolute, and inspiring the men behind her by her perfect contempt of death.

"Hold! Gipsies of the Sea!"

The cry of the Corsair Queen caused every Gipsy to halt and half turn toward her.

"That leader is as brave as a lion, spare him!"

"Ay ay," went up in a hoarse response from the Gipsies of the Sea.

"And those two you know—Chandos and Nunah!

"Let the hand of no Gipsy be raised against their life."

"They belong to me."

Another response from the Gipsies of the Sea found that they well understood the meaning of their Queen, who again shouted, and in her clear, ringing tones:

"Now, Gipsies of the Sea, take this schooner!"

A yell from the wild crew, far wilder than the pirates they fought, and they moved forward with irresistible rush.

And bravely were they met, with pistols flashing in their faces, a stern stubborn front, and a wall of steel cutlasses.

Down went many a Gipsy before that determined wall of outlaw humanity; but on they pressed, and by mere force of numbers they drove the pirates back.

Like a king of battle fought Chandos, and often did he sweep a space around him.

Like a tigress fought Nunah, until before her her foes shrank back.

And Adrian Arundel, calm, reckless and deadly he met his enemies, and one by one they fell before him; but others rose in the places of the slain and wounded, and well he knew it

was but a question of time, and a short time at that.

At length there came a wild shout in the rear of the pirates.

It was the regular cheer or buzzah of man-of-war's men, and over the bulwarks and taffrail came a score of American tars.

And at their head was Captain Mortimer Lennox, the handsome young commander of the crippled brigantine, who, fearing the Gipsies, from the determined stand of the pirates, might be beaten back, had decided to board and join in the *melee*.

Taken in the rear, already suffering fearfully, the pirates of the schooner knew that resistance was wholly useless, and turned toward their young captain.

But he had made up his mind to die right there, and shouted:

"Cut them down! die here, lads, for no mercy will be shown you."

A faint cheer answered him, and still his crew struggled on.

But presently Mortimer Lennox sprung forward, confronted the young chief, and fired upon him.

With a groan the pirate leader, Adrian Arundel, sunk to the deck, and then loud and earnest went up the cries of his crew for quarter.

Yet two stood there with folded arms, calm and reckless, who would not cry for mercy, and beholding them the Corsair Queen cried in ringing tones:

"On your lives, harm not those two!"

"No, you will reserve us for a fate more suited to your ideas of cruelty," was the answer of one.

"Yes, Nunah, traitress that you are, and thou, Chandos, disgraced Gipsy, I will reserve you for a fate you deserve," said the Corsair Queen, advancing toward them, her sword and pistol in hand, to suddenly start back as a cry at her feet caused her to bend her eyes downward.

And then it was her time to start back, for it was the schooner's captain, and he cried in ringing tones, as he raised himself upon one arm:

"Queena Gray, you are not dead then?"

"Who calls Queena Gray?" asked the woman, trembling violently.

"I do, Adrian Arundel, your friend of the long ago.

"No, no, do not say you are not Queena Gray, for you cannot deceive me."

"She is Queena Gray, an American, not a Gipsy."

The words were deep and stern, and were uttered by Chandos the Gipsy King.

But unheeding them the woman said:

"Yes, I am Queena, and you are my old boy lover, Adrian Arundel, but now you are Adrian the Pirate."

"Ay, I am Adrian the Pirate, Queena Gray, but believing you dead made me what I am," he hissed forth.

"Be you what you may I utter no word of censure, Adrian," she said softly, and then turning to some of her Gipsy crew, she said:

"Bear that man on board my schooner, and see that he does not die."

"And, Vestal, put that traitor and traitress in irons on board the Huntress," and she pointed to the Gipsy King and Nunah, who smiled and uttered no word, submitting quietly to their fate.

"Pardon me, lady, but I again have to thank you for a service rendered," and Captain Mortimer Lennox stepped forward and confronted the Gipsy Queen.

"I am ever glad to serve my country, Captain Lennox, for, as you doubtless heard just now, I am an American," she answered in a low tone, as though the remembrance was painful to her.

"The Government shall hear of your exploit, in capturing the famous Pirate Adrian, and in saving the brigantine a second time."

"Captain Lennox, I claim as my reward for my services, Adrian the Pirate, and the two prisoners I had put in irons; the vessel and other prisoners are yours, and I pledge you, whether the pirate chief lives or dies, he'll never sail under an outlaw flag again."

"I think I shall have to report him as dead, or else I will get into trouble for giving him up," said the officer with a smile.

"Report him dead, then, for what else can you do, as I will not give him up, and you see I am in the majority, sir," and a bright smile flashed over the face of the Corsair Queen.

"True, I am powerless, and I might as well

make the best of it and say no more, other than to thank you for the vessel and prisoners."

"Yes, the vessel I give you, as it was stolen from my fleet; the prisoners you know best what to do with."

"Yonder lies a pleasant and safe bay, and I advise you to tow the schooner and brigantine in there for repairs; if you need other aid command me."

He gazed with increasing admiration upon the beautiful woman, and thanking her, bade her farewell and turned away, a deep pain at his heart that she was not other than she was, that he might lay his heart and hand at her feet.

Going on board the Huntress the Corsair Queen gave the order to her crew to cast off the grapnels, signaled her fleet to follow, and sped away down the Chesapeake, while the brigantine's crew having secured the pirate prisoners, worked the two vessels into the bay of Graylands for repairs, a circumstance that sent the negroes flying from the bluff in terror of "dem everlastin' bloody coarse-hairs."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

GIPSY JUSTICE.

STRAIGHT across the bay sailed the Gipsy fleet, and before the dawn of the day following the capture of Adrian, the Pirate, the anchors were let fall in the St. Michael's.

To those accustomed as were the Gipsies to pitching their tents, it was short work to make an encampment, and then the tribe of men, women and children devoted themselves to what work or pleasure they cared for, yet all seemed to feel that the night would bring some dire scene that all must witness.

As for the Gipsy Queen she was still on board the Huntress, and in the cabin lay the wounded pirate chief.

Though severely wounded, the doctress of the Gipsies, a woman skilled in wounds and medicine, said it was not fatal, and the tidings seemed to give joy to Queena, who sat by the buccaneer, nursing him devotedly.

Not allowed to talk himself he listened to the Gipsy Queen, as she told of their past when they were children together, and of their last meeting at the convent in Paris, when he had called on her, his vessel having put into Havre for a few days.

"Adrian," she said, in her soft, low tones.

"How strange that we should meet thus."

"Strange indeed, Queena."

"Do you remember in that olden time, when we were little more than children, how you held me in bonds I could not break, and would not if I could, and now I am again in bondage, for I am your prisoner."

"You are no prisoner of mine, Adrian, for you are free as soon as your wound will permit you to go."

"But I feel, for the sake of that olden time, you will not again be what you have been of late."

"Adrian, I have often thought of those by-gone days."

"In my saddest hours they have come back to me, and I have wondered and wondered what I would have been had fate not dealt so unkindly with me."

"The old home where I was born, and where I lived so happily as a girl."

"You remember reverses caused my father to lose it, and then good fortune came to him again and he bought it back."

"It was called haunted, and people feared it as it was before my father enlarged it and made it what it now is."

"But I never stood in awe of the dear old place, and the explorations we made then as children, have well served me since: yes, well indeed, for I have struck terror to an evil heart by what I then found out."

"But, Queena, where have you been all these long years?"

"Abroad."

"I know that, but where?"

"My father placed me at a convent in Paris, and there I remained."

"Of that I know, for it was there I visited you."

"But after that, after you left the convent, Queena?" persisted the pirate captain.

"Ah me! I went on the continent with some friends, and was to return home soon again; but alas! then it was that adversity overtook me, and to one man, he who dragged poor Lou Wallace down to her grave, I owe it that I am what I am."

"I knew that he wanted my money, and I

did all in my power to fascinate him, to win his love, that I might make him suffer, for I was revengeful when I thought of poor Lou."

"At last I refused him, and bitterly did I do it, and believed we had parted forever."

"But no; his nature was revengeful too, and he determined to wreak a fearful vengeance upon me."

"And shall I tell you what he did?"

"Yes, Queena."

"He made me what I am, Adrian."

"And what are you, Queena?" he asked, in low, earnest tone.

"I am the Gipsy Queen, Mistress of the Chandos tribe of the Roving Race."

"And called the Corsair Queen?"

"Yes, by the British."

"And the Americans?"

"No; they know me as their friend; for am I not an American?"

"Have I forgotten my dear, native land in all my wanderings?"

"No, no; I am still an American, Adrian."

"And a Gipsy Queen?" he said, more and more anxious to solve the mystery.

"Yes; a Gipsy Queen, and made so by the man I told you I was revenged upon in the past."

"But, oh! has he not repaid that little debt of revenge ten-fold?"

"And now it is again my time to strike; and strike I have, strike I do, and strike I shall to the bitter end."

"You ask me how it is that I, an American girl, educated, refined, inheriting a large fortune, am the queen of a Gipsy tribe."

"I will tell you, and I will show you, Adrian Arundel, that I have been their queen in everything; and their king, whom I captured on your vessel, which you took from me, shall suffer as I desire for his treachery."

"I have made the tribe Gipsies of the Sea, instead of forest children, and, as I have, with my fleet, served America, I am content to have suffered."

"But let me tell you how it is I am what I am, and then will I hear, Adrian, why you have forgotten honor and kindred, and become a lawless rover of the seas."

In her calm, pleasant way, Queena then told the story of the past, leaving out not one atom of its bitterness, and not by one word offering extenuation for herself.

In dismay at first, and then with intensest interest, Adrian Arundel listened to all.

Then he said, warmly:

"Queena, no one can blame you, for you certainly have been the football of fate."

"I assuredly do not, and to-day I tell you what, as a boy I told you, that you are the one being I could love."

Adrian Arundel had always loved Queena Gray, and he had lived with the hope of one day making her his bride.

And though there had been no love affair between them, she had felt that he was the one being whom she cared to be pledged to for life.

But the tidings that she had committed suicide in Spain, and on account of her love for a man who cared not for her, for so the story had gone, had nearly broken Adrian Arundel's heart.

To drown his sorrows he had taken to dissipation, and drink had led him to do things that brought upon him censure from all, until at last he went to gambling away his inheritance, and in the end brought disgrace upon himself.

What he eventually became the reader knows: but meeting Queena once more, his good resolves came back, and he had whispered:

"It was kind of you, Queena, not to give me up to be hanged, and if I recover from this wound I will never do wrong again."

"You will recover, Adrian, for I feel that you will, and if you do, I will give you this very vessel, and get you letters of marque that you can go into an honorable service," was her answer.

"And you?"

"Wait."

"Tell me, Queena."

"I say wait," and she arose and left him, for already were the evening shadows falling.

CHAPTER XL.

THE DOOM.

THE Gipsy camp, in spite of its well-trained denizens to be unmoved under scenes most trying, was evidently excited as to what the night would bring forth.

They knew that now no mercy would be shown their former king, and they felt that Nunah would receive none.

Chandos, in spite of his ever stern mien, had been a favorite with them in the past; but they despised him for such a weakness in love, when in all else he had ever been so strong.

Their queen they both feared and loved, and they all felt their bettered condition since she had been in power.

Her they did not condemn for having come into their midst as the bride of their king, and they felt, that though not a Gipsy by blood and birth, she certainly looked like a thorough child of the Roving Race, and had proven herself one of them, ever devoted to their best interests and ever self-sacrificing.

As to Nunah they felt contempt for her.

They believed that she had been afraid to die, when at the Haunted Ruin, and had feigned death.

They believed that she had urged her grandmother, the Fate Queen, to take her from the grave after her burial; and more, they even hinted that she had taken the life of the old sorceress and fortune-teller, to the better play her part.

Having deceived them with a pretended knowledge of sorcery and star-reading, they wished her to die, and not one atom of pity was felt for her.

Thus, as night again approached, they were from children to old men, all excited over what must transpire in their midst, and eagerly stood apart, waiting and watching for the assembling of the Death Judges, which they knew had been summoned.

With darkness there was seen a man clothed in deep black, wearing a mask and carrying a torch, enter the encampment and take his stand near the tent of the Gipsy Queen.

Then another came, and another, until the thirteen Death Judges had assembled.

A few minutes after the Gipsy Queen came forward and said, simply:

"Death Judges, you condemned to death Chandos, once your king, and Nunah, a Gipsy girl; before they could suffer the penalty of their crimes they escaped, through the aid of allies, the punishment that was to be inflicted, and leagued themselves with pirates.

"That pirate chief begs for their lives, saying they have served with courage as his officers; but Gipsy justice knows no mercy, and I ask you what shall be their doom?"

"Death!"

The word broke in chorus from their lips.

"Bring then the prisoners!"

Two of the Death Judges went after Chandos and Nunah, and in a few moments they faced their Judges, calm and unmoved.

Chandos the king stood upright, his irons seemingly scorned by him, for his arms were folded upon his broad breast, leaving the heavy chains to fall upon either side of him.

As the red light of the torches fell upon him, it was seen that his face was utterly motionless, and not a quiver of his frame denoted that death held the slightest terror for him.

As for Nunah she was equally unmoved.

Once before, without fear, the reader has seen her face what she believed death, and carry the fatal cup to her lips to save the man she loved.

Now, with that man by her side, with him to die with her, it seemed that joy, rather than fear or sorrow, rested upon her beautiful face.

They truly loved, and for a short time, although living upon an-outlaw vessel, they had been happy in their loves.

But the dream had been rudely broken, the cup of happiness dashed from their lips and in its stead was the cup of death.

But, together, they would sip its contents as though it were nectar, and find no bitterness in the dregs.

So Chandos felt, and so did Nunah feel.

Again facing them the Corsair Queen said:

"Death Judges, I had intended to pass sentence upon these two traitors, but now will not do so, but leave it to you.

"What shall be their fate?"

A moment the thirteen Death Judges communed together in a low tone, and then in chorus they said:

"Poison."

"Who shall give it?"

"They shall drink it from the Cup of Hope."

"Enough! bring those cups."

The order was obeyed, one of the Gipsy Judges going after them.

Soon he returned, bringing the gold and silk

ver goblet in which King Chandos had pledged Queena some time before.

"Are they prepared?" asked the queen.

The Judges who held them nodded assent.

"Give them to me."

She took them in her hands, and advanced toward the prisoners, and said:

"In these cups are your doom; have you aught to say?"

Nunah smiled proudly yet made no reply, and Chandos said in a low tone:

"I would see my child, my little Zitelle."

"Yes," and Queena's voice trembled slightly.

"No!"

All started, for the deep negative came from the Death Judges.

Queena looked toward them for explanation.

"A king accused of crime can hold no speech with a child," said one.

"Enough, I am content; give me the cup," said Chandos, sternly.

The Gipsy Queen advanced and handed a cup to each, the gold one to Chandos, the silver goblet to Nunah.

"Drink!"

They took the goblets, glanced unflinchingly into the dark liquid that they knew was deadly poison, and then turned toward each other.

One long look that spoke volumes they took into each other's eyes, and then slowly raised the goblets to their lips.

Quaffing the contents, they dashed them aside, and stood like statues.

A moment only they stood thus, and then Nunah reeled and fell heavily to the ground.

Chandos glanced down upon her with a grim smile, then turned his gaze upon the Judges, one by one.

Then he looked upon the Gipsy Queen, who stood but a few paces from him, and suddenly thrusting his hand into his bosom, he drew forth a dagger and sprung upon her.

No, not upon her, for death caught him on the way, and he fell at her feet a corpse, burying the blade in the ground to the hilt.

The Corsair Queen had not moved, and had not the poison taken effect as it did, she would surely have died by the hand of the Gipsy King.

"Is he dead?" she asked, calmly.

"Yes," answered a Judge, who placed his hand upon the heart of the king.

"Is she dead?"

"Yes."

"Let them have burial."

So saying, the Corsair Queen turned away and entered her tent, while the Death Judges raised the bodies of the dead in their arms and moved slowly toward the shore.

Into a boat they got and pulled out upon the dark waters, into which, loaded with chains, Chandos and Nunah found graves.

CHAPTER XLII

AT LAST.

"ROSE, we are lost! behold!"

The speaker was Captain Vincent Vance, and he stood upon the deck of his swift-sailing privateer, several months after the scenes related in the last chapter.

It was off the mouth of the Cape Fear, several leagues seaward, and he was returning to the Chesapeake after a most successful cruise, for he had captured several merchantmen that proved valuable prizes.

After nightfall a calm had fallen upon the sea, followed by a dense fog, and with the break of day a breeze had sprung up, the sails were set, and the schooner was just put on her course northward, when the fog lifted from the face of the deep, and the eyes of the Captain had fallen upon a sight that startled him, and brought forth the words:

"Rose, we are lost! behold!"

And no wonder that he was alarmed, and every man on board gave himself up as lost, when their eyes fell upon a dozen vessels within hailing distance.

Ahead, upon either quarter, and astern they were, moving quietly along under easy sail, and wholly surrounding the privateer.

From a safe anchorage inshore they had seen the privateer becalmed at night, recognized her, and when the fog came up, put their boats ahead with muffled oars and pulled out and surrounded her!

All knew as well as their captain that they were the Gipsies of the Sea.

And all knew there was no hope.

"Ho! the schooner ahoy!"

The hail came in trumpet tones across the water from the Huntress which was not two cable lengths away.

"Ay ay, what is it?" asked Lieutenant Rose, for Vincent Vance made no effort to answer.

"Do you haul down your flag, or shall we board you?"

Lieutenant Rose looked to his captain for reply.

"There is no hope: strike your colors," he said moodily.

"We strike our flag," was the sullen answer.

"Bid your commander come on board."

With a trembling heart Vincent Vance obeyed, and the boat soon ran alongside of the Huntress.

Vestal met him at the gangway and said quietly:

"Our captain would see you, sir, in the cabin."

Silently Vincent Vance followed the Gipsy officer and was ushered into the cabin, the companionway being closed behind him.

Seated at a table he beheld the slender form of the one whom he believed to be Horace Gray.

"What! you the commander of this craft?" he gasped.

"Yes, and more, Vincent Vance, I am commander of the fleet; be seated, for your trembling limbs will not hold you when you hear what I have to say."

Silently the man sunk into a chair, leant his arms upon the table and gazed into the face before him.

And the Gipsy Queen looked upon his haggard countenance, marked with lines of sorrow, and his hair, now almost white, and smiled triumphantly.

"Vincent Vance, my sister was revenged upon you for wronging a friend of hers, and she discovered you to make you suffer."

"To revenge yourself on her what did you do?"

"Nothing," the man gasped.

"You lie; you hired a Gipsy King to put her to death; but he took your money, gave her a drug that placed her in the semblance of death, told you he had killed her and you left satisfied, while he married the maiden upon one condition from her."

"That condition was that she should have revenge upon you."

"You know that Violet Gray inherited Queena Gray's fortune, and you married her to get possession of it."

"Now that oath which Queena Gray took to be revenged upon you she has kept."

"Kept?"

"Yes, for she pretended to be her dead brother, Horace Gray—"

"Great God! you are Queena Gray," he cried, trying to spring to his feet.

But his legs proved powerless to bear his weight and he sank back in the chair.

"Yes, I am Queena Gray, Vincent Vance."

"My child! my child! what of my poor Zitelle?" he groaned.

"Oh, I have her: I did intend to wreck her young life, but she learned to love me and I spared her."

"She is now at Graylands, under the care of her old nurse, and I will write the agent, and guardian of your late wife, to see to her comfort and happiness, telling him you were killed in a sea combat, in which your vessel was sunk."

"Mercy, Queena!"

"Mercy! why I am merciless toward you, and you made me what I am."

"No, I have no mercy, for I know you as you are, as I knew your wife before you, and you are to die, I tell you frankly."

"I am not fit to die."

"Do you think you are worthy to live?"

"Oh let me live, Queena Gray."

"I am not Queena Gray, but the Queen of the Chandos Gipsies, the Corsair Queen, as the English call me, and I have no mercy in my heart."

"I have longed for this moment and it has come, and now I tell you, up to the yard-arm of your own vessel you hang within the hour."

"Mercy!"

"I tell you I am merciless; now go with me on board of your vessel."

She left the cabin, and a Gipsy guard, at her command seized the trembling wretch, and

they entered a boat and were rowed to the privateer schooner.

"Signal to the Surf and bid Captain Arundel come on board," she said to Vestal who had accompanied her.

All on the schooner gazed in amazement at the woman, for she had resumed her Gipsy garb, and calling the crew aft she said in her clear, terse way:

"Lads, I do not intend to take you prisoners, only to give you a new commander, and one who will be to you all that you wish."

"Here he is," and she motioned to Adrian Arundel, who stepped forward and saluted the crew in a way that caused them to feel he was every inch a sailor.

"Those," continued the Corsair Queen, "who do not wish to serve under this officer, can be put ashore, for he commands this vessel, and as before she will be an American privateer, and render her government far better service than under Vincent Vance and bring to you far more prize money."

"As for this man, your late captain, I shall hang him to the yard-arm, for years ago he wronged a lovely girl who took her own life, and afterward paid a man to kill me; and more, I saw him kill a fellow villain who was serving him, and know him to be as black hearted a wretch as lives."

"Vestal, run that man up to the schooner's yard-arm."

"Vincent Vance, at last I have my full revenge on you."

In vain the pleadings and struggling of the poor wretch, he was seized, bound and hoisted to the yard-arm, the rope cutting off his shrieks for mercy.

In deadly silence all stood, until at last, at a signal from the Corsair Queen, the rope was cut, and the body of Vincent Vance dropped with a heavy plunge into the sea and sunk from sight forever.

"Adrian, this vessel is your own now, and I trust you to redeem the name you have lost."

"When you have done so, seek at the Haunted Ruin, near San Pablo, in Spain, the Gipsy Queen."

She turned away without another word, entered her boat and rowed away, just as Adrian Arundel in ringing, seamanlike tones bade his crew spring to work and get the schooner under sail.

Half an hour after the fleet of the Gipsies of the Sea was heading northward along the coast, while the privateer schooner had laid her course south, bound on a cruise under her new commander, so strangely placed over her to control her destinies.

CHAPTER XLII.

CONCLUSION.

THE war of 1812 closed with honor to America, and fame to many a gallant officer of the United States navy.

And there was another class of war-vessel that won a fame which will ever cause a halo of romance to hang about them, and make them a theme for the author for ages and ages to come.

Those vessels were the American privateers, the Letters of Marque, which, commanded by bold men and thorough seamen, did much to add laurels to our navy during the long and hard-fought war.

Some of them, under their dashing commanders, so distinguished themselves that their deeds gained pardons for their officers for crimes done in the past against the Government, for all of the privateersmen were by no means men of honor, and a few were men who had once been in their country's service, and been dismissed therefrom.

And among the latter was Captain Adrian Arundel, whose gallant services on his schooner gained for him a pardon for his past sins, and reinstatement in the navy.

But, having a fortune from his prizes, he refused this honor, and set sail for Spain, where, beneath the shadows of the Haunted Ruin, he found, as in the days of Chandos, the Gipsy encampment.

After many wanderings, from land to land, upon which they had pitched their tents, and over the blue waters of many seas, where their fleet had won admiration and caused dread, they at last, toward the close of the year 1815, set sail for Spain.

Then, in one of the seaports, they suddenly sold their vessels, seemingly content to wander once more as in the olden time, and with a

train of wagons, set off from the coast, to return to their old camping-place.

And here it was that Captain Adrian Arundel sought them.

And queen of the tribe he found was the one-time beautiful Queena Gray.

Still beautiful she was, and a warm greeting she gave him, which caused him to offer her his hand in marriage, for his heart she had always had.

Need I say that it was accepted?

No, for I think the reader will surmise as much, and so dearly did the tribe love their queen that they gave their consent for her to wed one of a strange race, and acknowledged the American as Adrian, their king.

Little Zitelle, the Gipsy, grew to beautiful womanhood, but as her mother had had her educated, she cared not for the wild life of the Roving Race, and ran off and married a Spanish noble, and was not again heard from, so that the son of Queena and Adrian became ruler of the tribe after the death of his parents.

And Zitelle Vance also grew to beautiful womanhood, little knowing the story of her parents' lives; and, refusing many an offer from young men, at last married Commodore Mortimer Lennox, and never repented that she was brave enough to become "an old man's darling."

Thus *exeunt*, kind reader, the characters of my romance of THE CORSAIR QUEEN; OR, THE GIPSIES OF THE SEA.

THE END.

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